

C H I N A T O U R I S M

BIRD-WATCHING
ACROSS CHINA

WHERE ARE
THE LOP PEOPLE?

MOUNT PUTUO:
A FEMALE
BODHISATTVA'S
DOMAIN

222

ISSN 1025-577X



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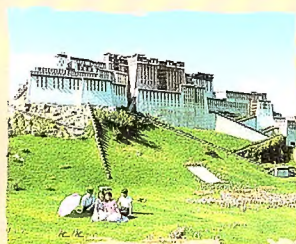
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TRAVEL OVER THE MAGNIFICENT MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS THROUGHOUT
CHINA IN A SINGLE DAY

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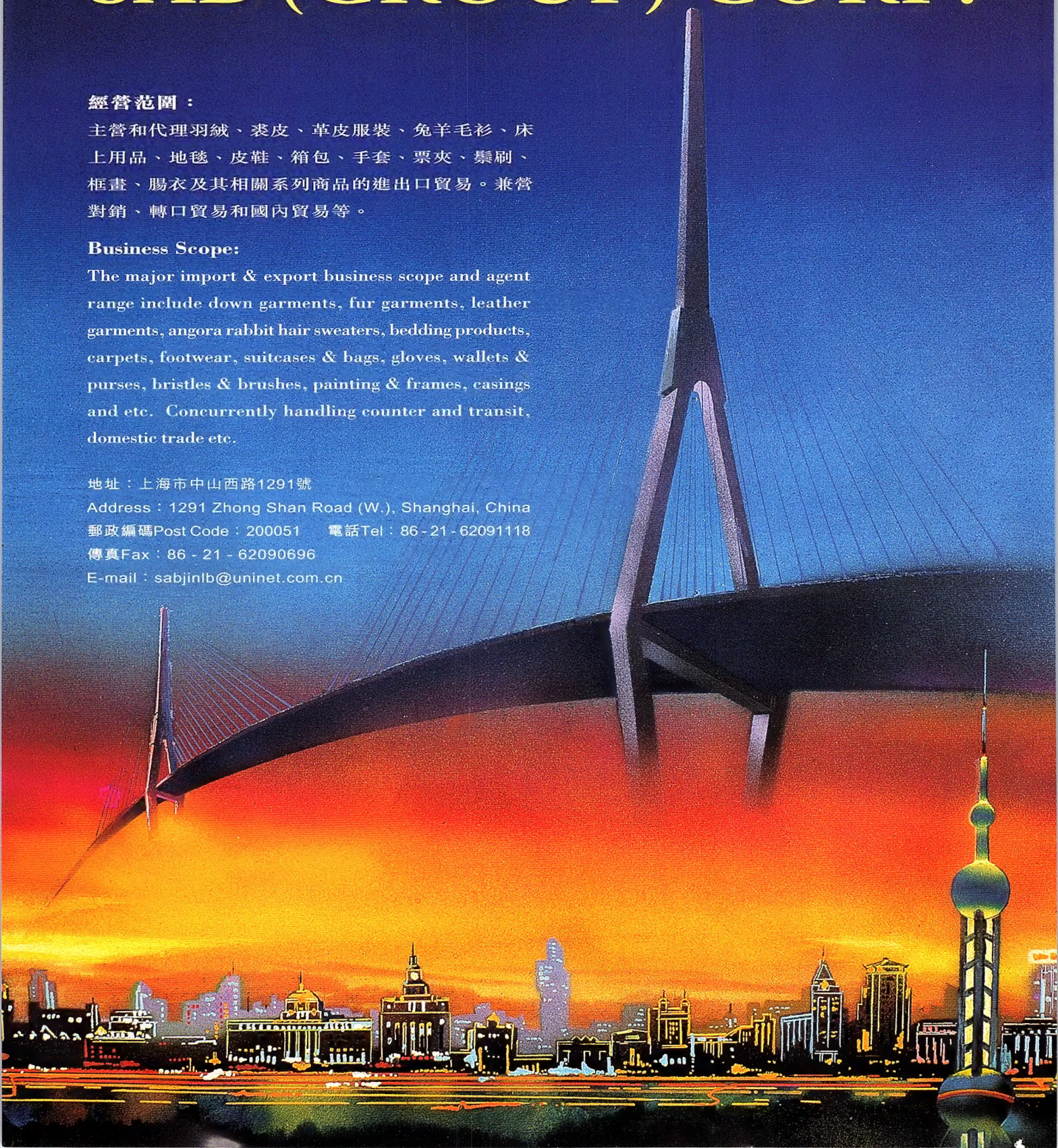
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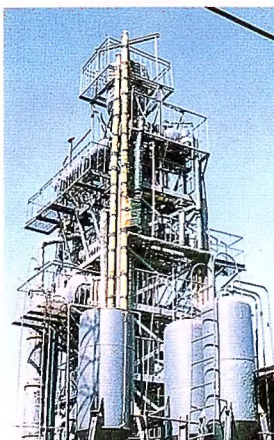


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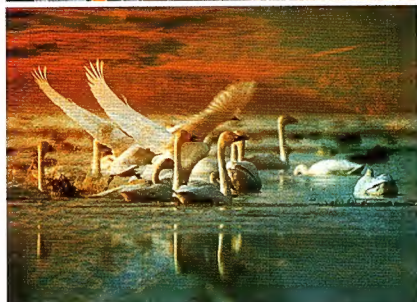
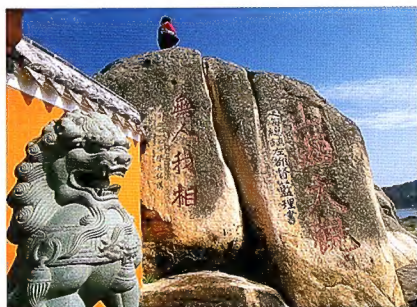
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Photos & article by Shi Baoxiu

Mount Putuo is known as the "Buddhist Kingdom on the Sea" because it is the domain of the Goddess of Mercy. In addition to the 70 Buddhist temples where the goddess is worshipped, a towering statue in her image was recently erected on the island. Touring Mount Putuo and adjacent islands of Zhujiajian and Taohua via Shenjiamen on Zhoushan Island, you can also enjoy the beautiful scenery of blue sea, fine sand and peculiar rocks, and taste the seafood right from the East China Sea.

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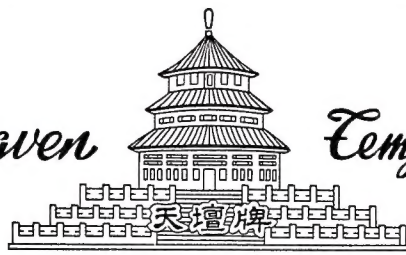
Photos & article by You Yungu

Cranes are depicted as celestial birds in Chinese mythology, and today, the endangered creatures are under state protection. In Lake Boyang in Jiangxi Province, the author tried varied ways to get close enough to take pictures of them. There are many other nature reserves scattered across the country — from Heilongjiang to Xinjiang, from Shandong to Qinghai, from Inner Mongolia to Hong Kong — where various rare birds can be observed.

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Temple of Heaven



Temple du Ciel

Taste Your Tea Enjoy Your Life

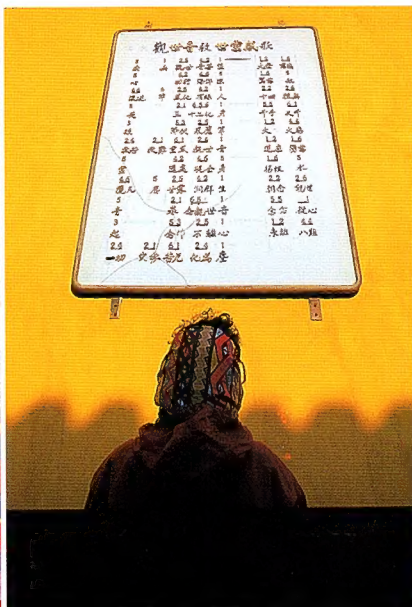
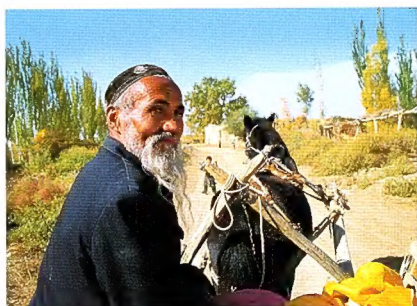


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FROM THE EDITOR

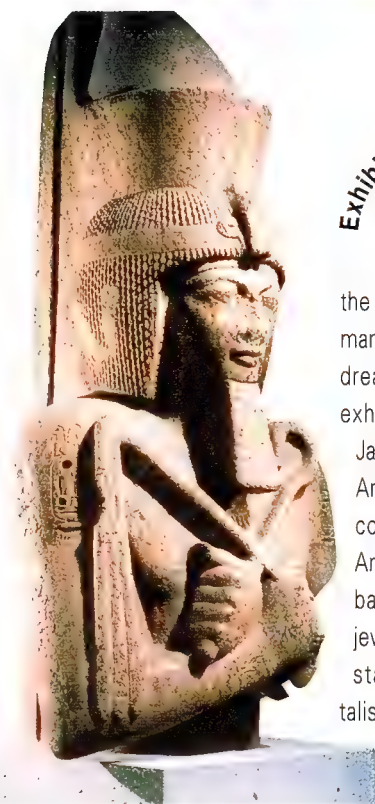
Zhoushan Islands on the East China Sea provide the largest fish-catching field in China. But some of the islands are also famous tourist spots. Mount Putuo, Zhujiajian and Taohua Island, whose geographical locations happen to form a triangle, have become the "Golden Triangle on the Sea" and attract tens of thousands of tourists every year. The majority of the travellers come mainly to see Mount Putuo, the domain of the Goddess of Mercy, the female Bodhisattva, where she is worshipped in numerous temples. This explains why there are always more women than men among the pilgrims here.

If you do not want to sail on the sea, go to Lake Boyang in Jiangxi Province by the Yangtse River, where you will find a kingdom of rare birds. There, you will see the endangered species of crane, swan and many others who gather at the lake for the winter.

After our stories about traversing the Lop Nur were published (No. 219), many readers expressed their interest in the Lop people. In this issue, you will find the village where the descendants of the ancient Lop people live and learn about their primitive traditions and unique customs. If Xinjiang is too far, you can choose the Bitu Lake in Yunnan, or the Big Canyon and the Waterfall Corridor in the Nanling Forest Park in Guangdong. Any way, at the beginning of winter, you have many choices for your China tours.

Photo by Shi Baoxiu





Exhibition / Hong Kong

Ancient Treasures of Egypt Displayed

Going to Egypt to see legacies of one of the world's oldest civilisations is the dream of many. Now people in Hong Kong can have their dream realised without going to Egypt. The exhibition held from November 3, 1998 to January 17, 1999 at the Hong Kong Museum of Arts presents to them the British Museum's collection of ancient Egyptian treasures. Among the 89 exhibits are stone sculptures, bas-reliefs, original religious documents, jewellery, furniture, sacrificial utilities, bronze statues of various gods and protective talismans, from 3,000 to 300 years B.C. They vividly reflect the life of the ancient Egyptians, their customs and beliefs.

Health Tour / Beijing



A Hotel for Senior Tourists

Jiuhua Mountain Villa located in the northern outskirts of Beijing has created a series of special programmes for senior travellers. Staying here, the tourists can have a health check-up and attend lectures given by prominent doctors of traditional Chinese medicine on subjects such as keeping fit, health food cuisine and psychological health. They can also receive treatment if necessary. Besides, they can swim in the hot spring waters, take herbal hot spring baths, pick fruit in the orchard or go sightseeing. Among the recreation activities, they can choose from practising Taiji exercises, bowling or golf.

The hotel is in the hot springs area where the air is fresh, without any industrial pollution. The guestrooms are provided either in villas or Beijing-style courtyards, suitable for elderly people. For meals, healthy and authentic herbal dishes are offered.

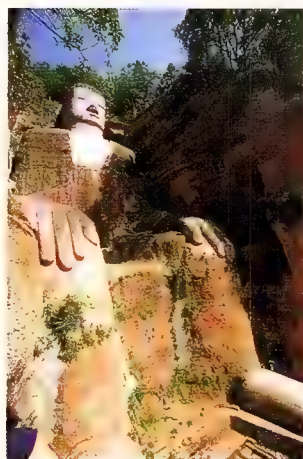
Buddha / Leshan



Great Money for the Great Buddha Statue at Leshan

The giant Buddha statue at Leshan, Sichuan Province, is world famous for

its long history and imposing 71-metre-high size. It has been listed as a Human Cultural Heritage by the UNESCO. To protect this precious 1,200-year-old cultural legacy from further erosion by the elements, the local government plans to invest 10 million yuan in a maintenance project.



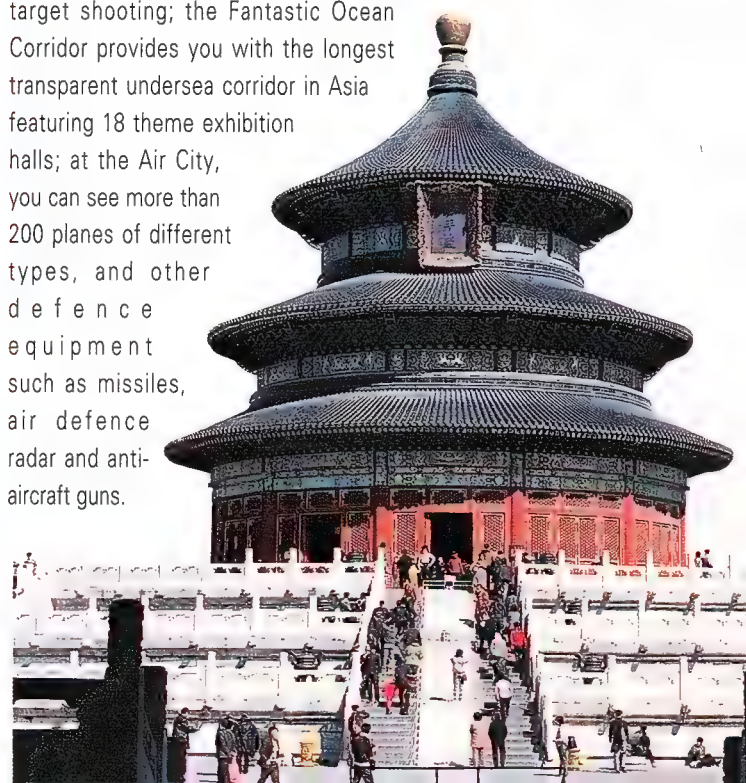
The first phase of the project is to "wash" the face of the Buddha and clean the weeds growing on the body. It is expected to be completed by the end of the year. In the following phases, the seat-terrace of the statue will be expanded and a drainage system will be added. Furthermore, the Nine-Bend Trail built during the Tang Dynasty will be repaired, and the other ancient planked paths widened.

Tourism / Beijing



New Programmes: Watching Tank Troupe Training and Target Shooting

In addition to the everlasting charms of Beijing's rich cultural legacy and progressive mobility, a series of new tourism programmes has been created to further cater to tourists' demands. For example, you can take part in the "Tank Troupe Tour" to watch the tank operators in training and practise target shooting; the Fantastic Ocean Corridor provides you with the longest transparent undersea corridor in Asia featuring 18 theme exhibition halls; at the Air City, you can see more than 200 planes of different types, and other defence equipment such as missiles, air defence radar and anti-aircraft guns.



Chinese Characters: 7,000 Years Old?

Evidence has been found that Chinese characters, which were previously thought to have emerged during the Shang Dynasty (2100-1600 B.C.), are at least 7,000 years old, 1,500 years older than ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics inscribed at religious sites some 5,500 years ago. The discovery was made by Cai Yunzhang, chairman of the Luoyang Society for the Study of *The Book of Changes* (also known as *I Ching*).

Cai, who has studied ancient Chinese culture for 18 years, found scratches on excavated earthenware made by people living in China in the Peigang Culture Period of some 7,000-8,000 years ago. These symbolic scratches are the same as the divinatory symbols in *The Book of Changes*, and were used for religious ceremonial purposes.

Treasures Found from Yuan Tomb, Beijing

Over 180 precious relics were unearthed from the tomb of Yelu Zhu, a premier of the Yuan Dynasty. Included in the findings are gold and silver plates, pottery, porcelain, figurines and other artifacts, some of them being described as masterpieces of the time by experts. This is the largest Yuan-dynasty tomb so far found in China. Located near the Summer Palace in the west suburbs of Beijing, the tomb is two metres underground and consists of a tomb gate, an aisle and five coffin chambers. The main chamber was Yelu Zhu's, the others apparently belonged to his wife and concubines.

Horses to Run Wild in Gobi

Chinese zoologists are making efforts to help the Mongolian horse return to the wild in the Gobi Desert in Gansu Province and the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in Northwest China. Scientists have noticed that the nearly 1,000 horses raised in zoos around the world are at risk of degenerating and losing their biodiversity. Recently, 10 Mongolian horses donated by Britain's Howletts and Port Lympne Foundation have been transported to the Nature Reserve in Anxi County. Two of the female horses are pregnant and are expected to give birth next summer.

The Mongolian wild horse is the ancestor of the modern domestic horse. The last time wild horses were seen in their natural habitat near Anxi County was in the 1960s. China began to re-introduce wild horses in the 1980s, and about 100 wild horses are now in breeding centres in Jimsar County in Xinjiang and Wuwei County in Gansu.

Wildlife Park, Shandong

The Jinan Wildlife Park will become the country's largest of its kind upon completion next year. Covering an area of 667 hectares, the park in the capital city of Shandong Province will be divided into five areas, including an African walking area, a herbivore area and a carnivore area. It will feature outdoor breeding grounds and an 11-kilometre sightseeing route.

Tianjin to Host Green Fair

The Pacific Economic Co-operation Council (PECC) will hold its first International Trade and Investment Fair in North China's port city Tianjin in September 1999. The theme of the fair will be "Environment and Homestead in the 21st Century". While emphasising the sustainability of economic growth and the protection of environment, the fair will highlight new techniques, materials and products for environmental protection, environmentally friendly commodities and food, as well as green products for housing maintenance. To facilitate the long-term co-operation between members of the PECC, a Pacific Village will be built in the Tianjin Economic and Technology Development Area.

Room Rate Regulated, Beijing

The Beijing Tourism Association has recently regulated the hotel rates in the city. The lowest average daily rates are set to be 750 yuan, 600 yuan and 380 yuan for five-, four- and three-star hotels; and 230 yuan and 160 yuan for two-star and one-star hotels. The rates can go up by 15 percent in the busy season and be 20 percent lower during the slack season. It is also set that room rate for tourist groups who have made their reservation through travel agencies can be 25 percent lower than the lowest rate.

Miao Costume Museum, Guizhou

A museum specialising in the traditional dresses of the Miao ethnic group has been established in Guizhou, capital of Southwest China's Guizhou Province. The more than 3,000 traditional costumes of the Miao displayed in the museum reflect the colourful culture and the 5,000-year history of the Miao people.

Hong Kong: Best Business City

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was voted "Best City in the World for Doing Business" in a 1998 business travel survey conducted recently by the *Business Traveller Asia-Pacific* magazine. Hong Kong beat Singapore, London and New York, which took the second, third and fourth places respectively.

This achievement highlights Hong Kong's exceptional reputation as the business hub of Asia and comes hard on the heels of a similar finding by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), which shows that in 1997 Hong Kong ranked the fifth worldwide in number of international meetings hosted and was second only to Sydney in the Asia-Pacific region in market share, taking 7.2 percent of the world's total.

THE GOLDEN LAND ON THE EAST CHINA SEA

THE GOLDEN LAND ON THE EAST CHINA SEA

Photos & article by Shi Baoxiu



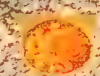
Mount Putuo: Ancestral Domain of the Goddess of Mercy



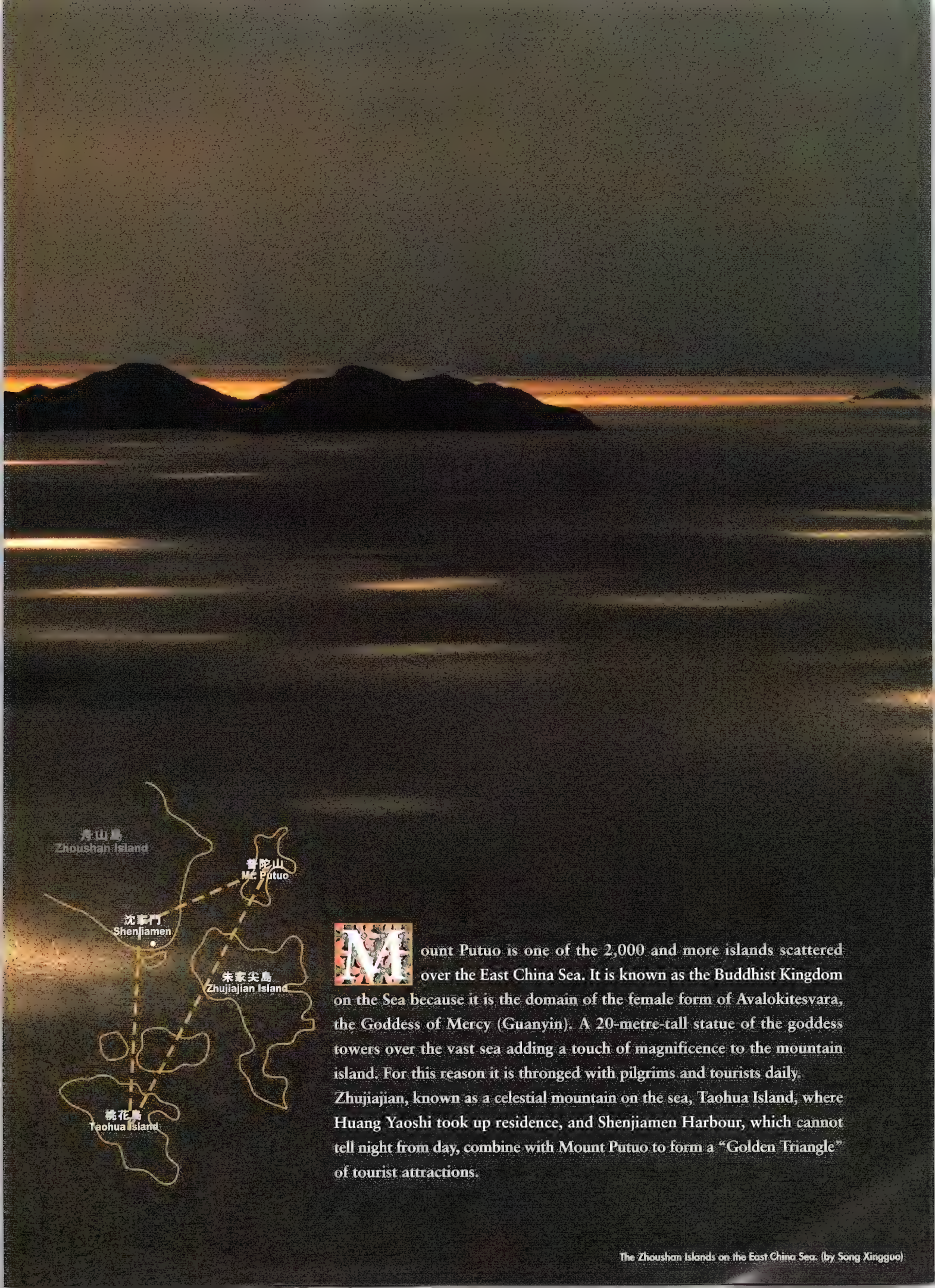
Zhujiajian: A Celestial Mountain on the Sea



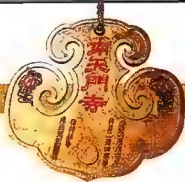
Taohua Island: Hiding Place of a Fictional Hero?



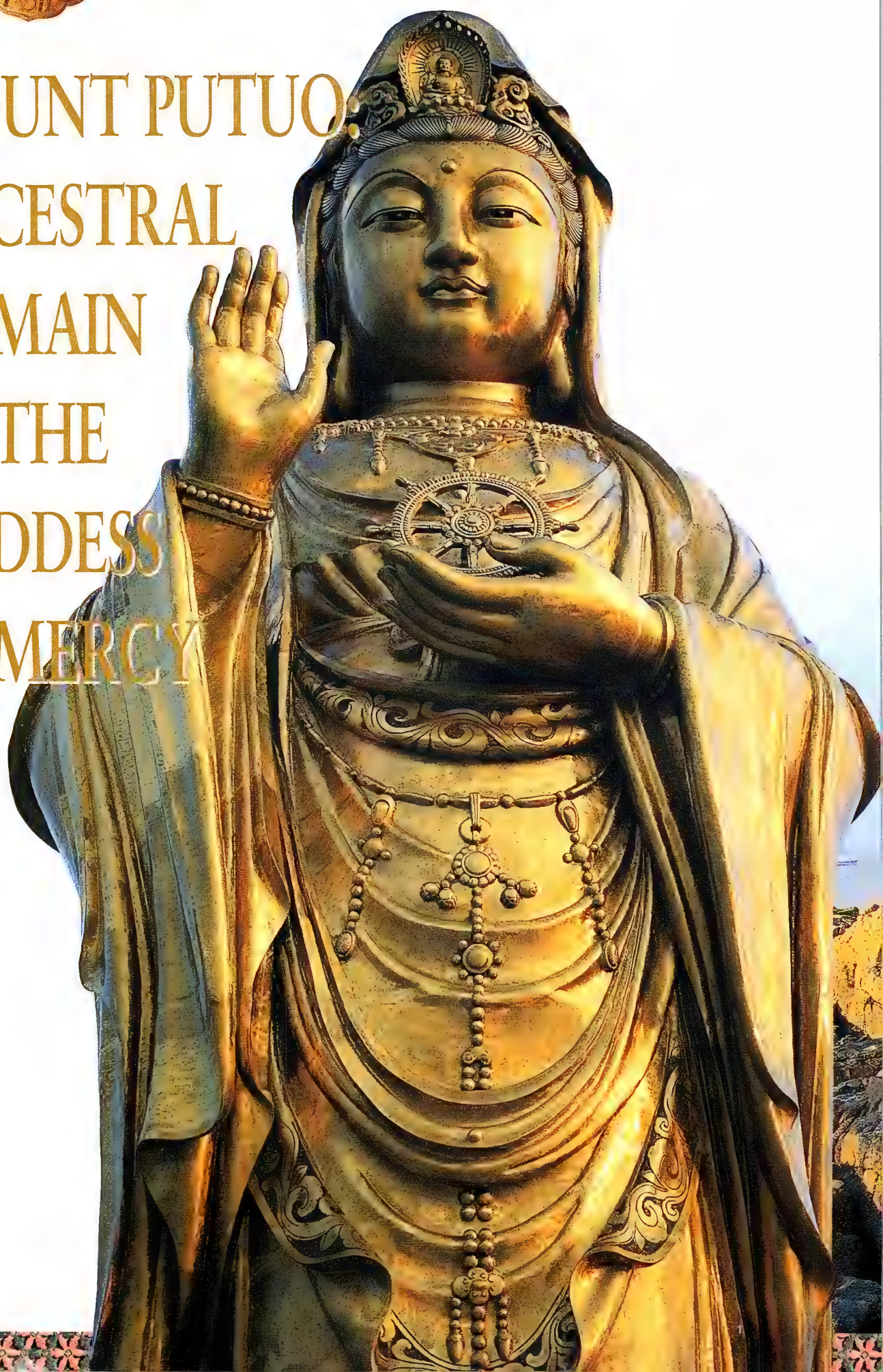
Shengjiamen: A Long Seafood Street



Mount Putuo is one of the 2,000 and more islands scattered over the East China Sea. It is known as the Buddhist Kingdom on the Sea because it is the domain of the female form of Avalokitesvara, the Goddess of Mercy (Guanyin). A 20-metre-tall statue of the goddess towers over the vast sea adding a touch of magnificence to the mountain island. For this reason it is thronged with pilgrims and tourists daily. Zhujiajian, known as a celestial mountain on the sea, Taohua Island, where Huang Yaoshi took up residence, and Shenjiamen Harbour, which cannot tell night from day, combine with Mount Putuo to form a “Golden Triangle” of tourist attractions.



MOUNT PUTUO ANCESTRAL DOMAIN OF THE GODDESS OF MERCY



Once on Mount Putuo you find yourself enveloped in an atmosphere of feminine softness. Even the sea wind seems to have lost its cutting edge. The sounds of Buddhist incantations drift by; listening closely, you realise they are mostly couched in female voices with a pleasant pitch.



Female Bodhisattva's Sanctuary

The feminine quality of Mount Putuo stems from the fact that it is the only one of the four major Buddhist mountain sanctuaries dedicated to a female, the Goddess of Mercy of the South Sea. The topography, too, reveals a gender difference from other mountain sanctuaries. There is something definitely muscular about the deep and wide Mount Wutai, the tall and boundless Mount Emei, and the mysterious and cunning Mount Jiuhua; and water is a rarity in all three. By contrast, Mount Putuo floats on the East China Sea, is heavily wooded, and though not tall, has a graceful contour. Because it is the ancestral domain of a female Bodhisattva, it also has many nunneries.



Goddess of Mercy: Guardian of Seafarers

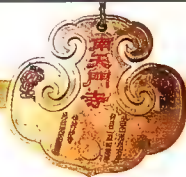
Once through the frontal archway, most people proceed along a seaside promenade that zigzags its way to the Nantianmen (Southern Heavenly Gate) via a group of reefs and a pine tree forest.

At only 10 metres above sea level, the gate is dwarfed by its namesake on Mount Taishan, the East Sacred Mountain. On a windy day the sea easily tosses waves over it. The top of the Dragon-Eye Rock behind the gate provides an overview of the vast East China Sea studded with fishing boats bound for unknown climes. The ethereal white hills of Zhujiajian shimmer in the distance.

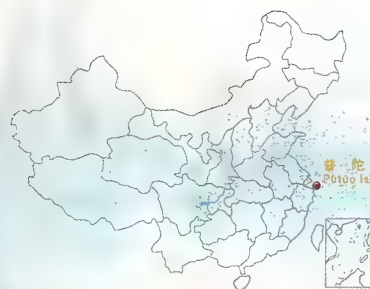
Atop the other end of the Jintan (Golden Beach) a huge gilded statue of the Goddess of Mercy glistens. This is the new landmark of Putuo, not yet on local tourist maps. One arm of the peninsula stretches into the sea like a titanic ship, with the Goddess standing at the bow, her face a study of motherly solicitude that inspires a sense of security in the hearts of seafarers.

1. The gilded statue of the Goddess of Mercy is adored for her soft and graceful face.
2. The sea-gazing Goddess of Mercy with the Wheel of Law in her hand seems to be standing at the helm of a huge "boat".





普陀山 Putuo Island



南海普陀名山勝境全圖 Scenic Spots on Putuo Island

蓮花洋
Lianhua Sea





白華頂
Baihua Peak

佛頂山
Mt. Foding
慧濟禪寺
Huiji Temple

雪浪山
Mt. Xuelang

海天佛國
Haitian Fuguo

楊梅庵
Yangmei Nunnery

龍潭庵
Longtan Nunnery

法雨禪寺
Fayu Temple

大雄庵
Daxiong Nunnery

悅嶺庵
Yueling Nunnery

千步沙
Qianbusha Beach

靈跡洞
Lingji Cave

梵音洞
Fanyin Cave

祥慧庵
Xianghui Nunnery

觀音閣
Guanyin Tower

潮音洞
Chaoyin Cave

百步沙
Baibusha Beach

普 陀 洋
Putuo Sea

不肯去觀音院
Bukenu Guanyin Nunnery

潮音洞
Chaoyin Cave

紫竹林庵
Zizhulin Nunnery

南海觀音立像
Statue of the South Sea Guanyin

金沙
Jinsha Beach

西方庵
Xifang Nunnery

南天門
Nantianmen

圓通庵
Yuantong Nunnery

大覺庵
Dajue Nunnery

塔子庵
Tazi Nunnery





Sunlight Graces the Consecration Ceremony

A year ago a grand ceremony was held to consecrate the newly established statue of the goddess. More than 1,000 ships congregated at Mount Putuo for the occasion, including passenger and pleasure boats that docked at local piers, huge ocean-going vessels anchored off shore, and small boats moored near the reefs. Never before had the island seen so many people. Even the goddess' birthday in April could only attract half as many pilgrims. Among the well-wishers were local islanders, and eminent monks from Buddhist mountain sanctuaries on the mainland. It was overcast that day. Black clouds scudded in the sky, threatening to rain at any moment. As the ceremony started with the beating of drums and tooting of horns, a huge hole suddenly appeared in the thick pall of clouds, and a shaft of sunlight penetrated through onto the statue. The crowd shouted out in unison, so loud that they drowned out the sound of the firecrackers.

The island became a great tourist attraction after word of this "miracle" spread. The local fishermen, sensing a lucrative business opportunity, established one inn and restaurant after another. Fishing, their chief source of livelihood for so many years, has been consigned to a sideline occupation.

The Profile of Mount Putuo

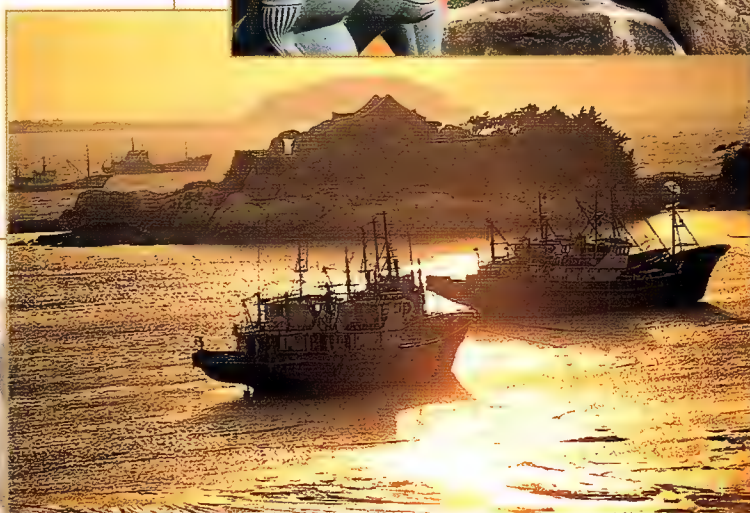
"Putuo" is a name borrowed from Potaiaka in India, meaning "beautiful white flower" in Chinese. Beside Mount Putuo there is another Buddhist island called Mount Luojia (Laka). Together they form a Buddhist Kingdom on the sea.

It is believed to be the domain of Avalokitesvara, or the Goddess of Mercy, because the goddess showed herself when an Indian monk preached Buddhism on the island during the Tang Dynasty. According to legend, in 916, the Japanese high monk Hui E obtained a statue of the Goddess of Mercy from Mount Wutai and intended to return home by sea via Ningbo. While sailing around Putuo island, strong winds and surging waves forced him to put ashore. Each time he attempted to sail out, the wind rose. After several tries, the monk finally realised that the Goddess of Mercy did not want to go to Japan. So, together with the local islanders, he built the Temple of the Goddess of Mercy Reluctant to Go. He returned to Japan empty handed on calm seas. Since then, more temples were built on the island.

The 1930s were a thriving period for Mount Putuo, with nearly 300 Buddhist temples, 18,000 Buddhist images and over 3,000 monks and nuns on the island. During the "cultural revolution" (1966-76), many temples were destroyed and all the monks and nuns were expelled. Since 1980, the Buddhist mountain has returned to vitality, broken temples have been rebuilt or renovated and monks and nuns have returned. Furthermore, many graduates from Buddhist colleges have arrived. Now there are over 70 Buddhist temples on the island.



1. This stone archway is the oldest gateway to the Buddhist sanctuary. Formerly it was the site of a passenger dock.
2. The jade carving of the goddess recently installed in a temple on Mt. Putuo
3. This boulder is said to be the head of the dragon on Mount Putuo, and the two depressions on its top are the dragon's eyes.
4. The blessings of the Goddess of Mercy have inspired a sense of security in the local fishermen.





Worshipping the Goddess in the Rain

Early one rainy morning, I scooted to the terrace of the statue with my umbrella. Contrary to my idea that tourists would stay indoors today, the route to the statue was overflowing with people, their umbrellas forming a long multi-coloured queue. Passing by a mountain ridge, I could see giant waves hitting the reef-infested shore, sending white froth up into the sky with a thunderous roar. A thick layer of dark clouds hugged the sea surface ever so closely. The rain became torrential, coming down sideways so that everyone had to hold their umbrellas sideways. Even so, we were drenched from the waist down, as if we had just gone wading.

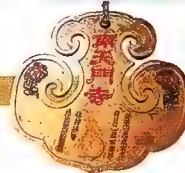
In no time the statue appeared imposingly. I hurriedly joined my fellow pilgrims in prostrating before the goddess. Everyone was murmuring wishes to the goddess, and it seemed that middle-aged women were most pious; perhaps they had a lot to tell the goddess, about their children and parents, as well as their own grievances. Kneeling on straw mats, with palms pressed together at their chests, they craned their heads and fixed their eyes on the kind face of the goddess, mindless of the cold rain and howling wind.



Heart-to-Heart Communion with the Goddess

The Goddess of Mercy is a saviour for many Chinese women. When something weighs heavily on a woman's mind, she could worship before a statue of the goddess in her house three times a day, or visit a nearby temple once every five days. Or she could visit this Buddhist domain on the sea on Mount Putuo several times every year, have a heart-to-heart chat with the goddess to unload her worries, and return home with a light heart.





Strict Requirements for Monks and Nuns

At present there are more than 300 monks and nuns on Mount Putuo, one-third of them being nuns. The young monks and nuns, one-third of the total, are from all over the country, though the majority of them are natives of Zhejiang and other coastal provinces.

The requirements for monks and nuns are strict. First, they must be over 18 years old; second, they must have permission from their parents; third, they must be proven by the local government to have no criminal record; fourth, they must be in good health with all their faculties (referring to the sight, hearing, sense of smell, taste, body and mind); fifth, they must have schooling beyond the third year of secondary school; and sixth, they must not belong to any political parties or organisations. Then, they have to pass a trial of three months before being admitted as monks or nuns.

1. Abbots from many famous Chinese Buddhist mountain sanctuaries and eminent overseas monks attended the inauguration ceremony for the Goddess of Mercy statue. (by Ye Wenqing)
2. Despite the rain and wind, pilgrims prayed to the goddess for blessings.
3. Pilgrims kneel before the goddess for a long time to show their sincerity.
4. A bird's-eye view of the Terrace of the Goddess of Mercy, which looks much like the deck of an aircraft carrier
5. The masculine prowess of the Heavenly King contrasts sharply with the feminine charms of the goddess.







All Devoted to One Bodhisattva

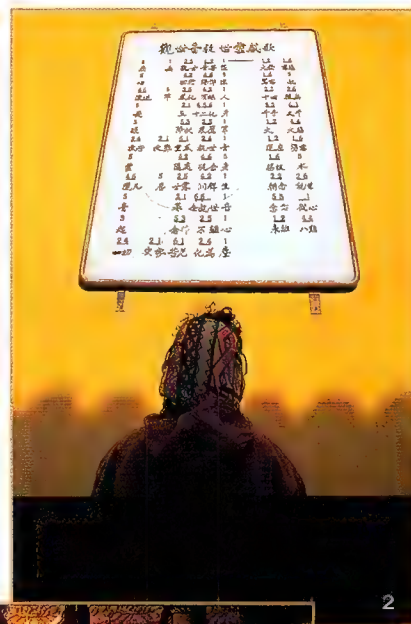
Seldom do I participate in Buddhist ceremonies, though on some occasions I would accompany my wife to visit a local temple. I would wait patiently outside the main hall while she performed the routine of three kow-tows and five prostrations. Thus my knowledge of Buddhism is limited. Leaving the terrace of the goddess, I made a big detour to the Zizhulin (Purple Bamboo Grove) Nunnery, and entered a mini-hall in the Bukequ (Reluctant to Go) Temple. Having stayed quite a while in this Buddhist world, I realised that every single temple on the island, whether big or small, has one hall that is devoted to the statue of the Goddess of Mercy.



Delicious Lunch for Only Two Yuan

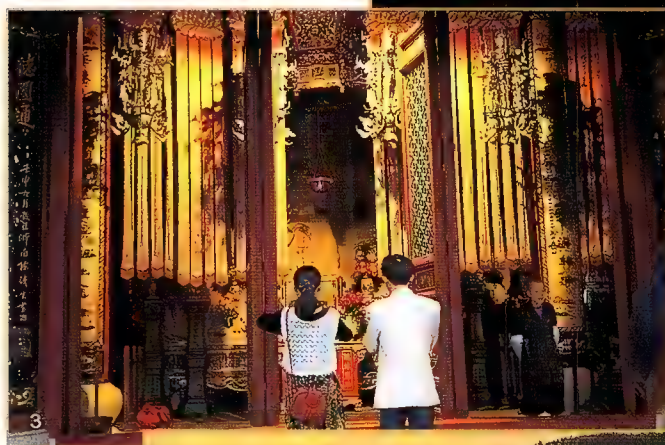
I eventually reached Puji Temple, the largest on the island. Leaving the long street outside the temple lined with shops, I saw pilgrims walking to a public dining room at the end of a long corridor.

Feeling pangs of hunger myself, and expecting delicious good food, I queued up in front of a wooden window to purchase my lunch coupon. The meal was surprisingly cheap — only two yuan. The tables and benches in the dining room were made of unfinished wood. I joined seven old ladies at a table. Before long a monk emerged with a serving of four dishes and one soup, which were of course a vegetarian's typical fare: gluten, bean curd, bean noodles, cabbage, radish, and bean shoots. Rice was provided as requested. All the dishes were exceptionally light in taste, as befitting the Buddhist doctrine for purifying the heart and curbing desires, and were beneficial for those who want to lose weight and reduce high blood pressure.



Close to the Heart of the Goddess

I noticed that the seven old women that had lunch at my table relished the meal down to the last morsel of food and the last grain of rice. They turned out to be lay Buddhists who came from different places and made the island their second home. They lived 10-20 in a room with very cheap rent, and paid only five yuan a day for meals — one yuan for breakfast, and two yuan each for lunch and supper. I could not think of a place where living could be so cheap. Despite the Spartan lifestyle on the island, they all lived in blessed contentment — being close to the heart of the goddess was all they wanted. Having become lost in this Buddhist world and unloaded all their worries caused by their children who did not act satisfactorily, these old sisters clustered together for warmth and commiseration.



1. With few exceptions, all main halls of the temples on Mount Putuo are enshrined with a gilded statue of Avalokitesvara of the South Sea. (by Ye Wenqing)
2. "Using a poplar twig the Goddess of Mercy sprinkles holy water on the mundane world and nurtures the multitude with this sweet dew. I pray to the goddess, and never forget Her Holiness..." — singing an ode to the Life-saving goddess.
3. The jade statue of the goddess in the central hall of the Purple Bamboo Grove Nunnery
4. The Hundred-Step Beach in the morning



Knitting with a Purified Heart

Making a left turn at the Puji Monastery and climbing for a short while uphill, I arrived at a tiny nunnery that was composed of a main hall and two side suites. It was so quiet there that the snoring of a sleeping cat was clearly audible. Right beside the cat the abbess was sitting against the door taking a nap. Sitting in the sunlight close by the window was a young nun, knitting a woollen sweater in a crimson colour. Hearing my footsteps she raised her head, glanced at me and then lowered her head again over her work.

Moving away from the nunnery, I saw a number of old ladies huddling on a boulder looking out to sea. Striking up a conversation with them I found they were local lay Buddhists, who had been staying on the mountain for three years. I asked why most nuns on the island were so young. They answered that they were either graduates from seminaries on the mainland or women disillusioned with life who chose to seek salvation on the island by eating three vegetarian meals a day and immersing themselves in Buddhist studies. The girl I had seen knitting earlier had apparently cried often during her first days here, but after a while she found that solitude purified the heart.



Prostration — Following the Tibetan Style

From the Pantuo Rock I went downhill by way of the Xitianmen (West Heavenly Gate) and the Cave of Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy), and caught a minibus to Mount Foding (Top of Buddhist Mountain). On this overcast day from the summit of the island, the mountains and the sea in the distance were reduced to a blur, like looking through a gauze curtain. The Huiji Monastery nearby, however, was in sharp relief, its red bricks and blue tiles gleaming amidst the verdure of green trees. Climbing down the hill and entering the front gateway of the monastery, I found a large man lying prostrate on the ground. He lifted his body, thrust his arms upwards and put his palms together at his chest, then went back down on his hands and knees, stretching out into a prone position again. This posture evokes images of Tibetans prostrating themselves every step of their way towards the Potala Palace in Lhasa.

Entering the monastery I found the man was not alone in his ritual. There were seven more well-dressed people, three women and four men, with their faces covered with dust. They prostrated themselves every step of the way towards each and every one of the halls on the premises. By the time I left the monastery they had already made their way down the mountain in this fashion. Eventually I was able to talk to the lead man, who was barely 30, when he broke the ritual and stood

1. Young couples come to pray for happy marriages. (by Ye Wenqing)
2. The pond outside the Puji Monastery, at which captive fish are set free
3. It is not uncommon to see old ladies who are lay Buddhists take up residence for two or three years in a temple.
4. Many of the new recruits of nuns and monks are graduates of Buddhist seminaries.

Ceremony for Meals: 'Passing the Hall'

"Passing the Hall" describes the dining style of Buddhist monks and nuns. At mealtime, all the monks and nuns gather in the Chanting Hall and first bow to the Buddha, then queue to enter the dining hall which contains a Dharma table and an incense table with an Amitabha statue. They recite the "Text of Offerings" before the meal and the "Text of Finishing Eating" after the meal.

The rules of conduct are as serious as those for Buddhist ceremonies. The monks and nuns cannot enter the hall in big strides, but must walk in quietly, holding their hands as in prayer. In the hall they must not laugh, chat or play. For second helpings, they must use signals rather than shout. They must sit upright and motionless like a bell, and may not cross their legs, bury their heads in the food or bend over the table. While eating, they must politely hold their bowls up. Waste is absolutely not allowed, not even one grain of rice or one piece of vegetable

up to drink from a roadside stream. The seven of them were workers from Guangxi Province who came to pay homage to the Goddess of Mercy at her ancestral domain. According to them, only by prostrating every inch of the way could they show their utter devotion to the goddess. "The more pious I present myself to her the more blessings she will give me," he said.



Office Workers Among the Pilgrims

Half an hour later I befriended a young couple who were both senior members of a foreign-funded company in Beijing, and were having a belated honeymoon at Mount Putuo. Seeing that the front of the young woman's shirt was dirty, I asked why and was surprised to learn that she, too, had been prostrating every inch of her pilgrimage to the goddess. "I could not believe I was doing it myself," she said, giggling. Once she was on the mountain, she simply could not help copying some of the fellow travellers — at least a dozen or so of them — prostrating themselves incessantly on their way up the mountain. "I thought she was out of her mind," said her husband, who was not in the mood to follow her example, "and I was torn between keeping her company and keeping a distance from her." The sight of a well-attired young woman doing this religious ritual amazed quite a few onlookers. A sympathetic old lady from Shanghai stepped forward and offered her a pair of kneepads.

My curiosity demanded that I ask her why she felt the need to do this. "Just for the feeling of it!" came the answer. "Do you have any other reasons?" I inquired. "I won't tell you!" It was her husband who let the cat out of the bag. "She wanted to ask the goddess to bless her with a son who is both clever and healthy, because the goddess governs marriage and childbirth."





1. There is something motherly about all the statues of the goddess at Mount Putuo despite slight differences in facial expressions.
2. Fayu Temple was known as Huguo Zhenhai Temple during the Ming Dynasty. Its name changed in the Qing Dynasty after a horizontal board inscribed with the characters, "Tian Hua Fa Yu" was bestowed by Emperor Kangxi.



Debate between a Monk and a Student

Of all the temples on the Putuo Island, the Fayu Temple is perhaps the most quiet. A road thrusts right through the front archway and meanders its way through a cluster of ancient trees to the temple's front courtyard. There is a Nine-Dragon Screen Wall in black and white, which certainly is not as gorgeous as its counterpart in Beijing's Beihai Park. On either side of the courtyard stands a multiple-layered stele made of blue stone and inscribed with Buddhist quotations.

Fayu Temple nestles at the foot of the Mount Foding, and that is why its halls are laid out one higher than the other, so that in the distance the temple looks like children's building blocks, albeit a bit more exquisite. Quite a few bald-topped ancient trees with gnarling branches and scaly trunks are seen in the compound of the temple. A number of senior lay Buddhists were washing bed sheets and making quilts. All the while the monks watched while sunning themselves under the trees.

Sitting on a stone stool under an ancient cypress tree, I suddenly heard two people having a heated argument. Looking over my shoulder, I saw a middle-aged monk debating with a visitor who looked like a student, about the role Buddhism played in life — negative or positive? The student argued that a Buddhist sanctuary is, at best, a place where losers in real life seek refuge, while the monk countered that without the guidance of Buddhist doctrines too many people would commit suicide or simply allow themselves to deteriorate. I left after listening to them for a while because I believed this was a debate that would never have a satisfactory outcome for either.

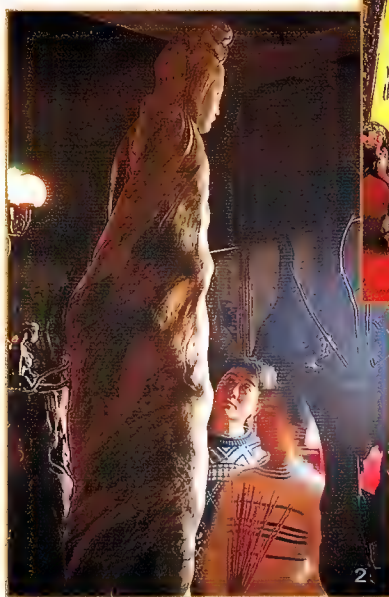


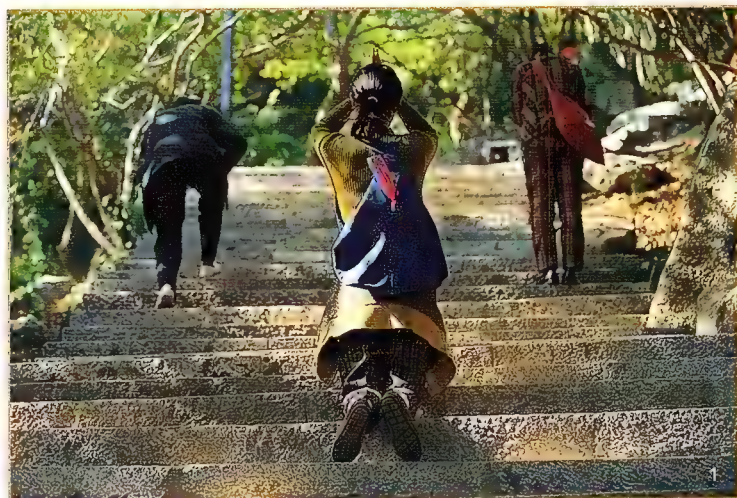
Root-Carvings of the Goddess of Mercy

On the granite rocks between the beaches of Qianousha and Baibusna stands the Pavilion of the Goddess of Mercy built recently. Entering the pavilion, you will see numerous root-carving statues of the Goddess of Mercy on the first, second and third floors. They are in various poses — some lying, some sitting, some standing and some holding babies — and with different expressions — smiling, solemn or thoughtful.

The tree roots, in strange shapes, are thick and rough with many points. It seems that the skilled artisans have “invited” out the Goddess of Mercy who was hidden inside them. The features, skin, and clothes of the sculptures are so graceful and delicate that it is hard to believe they are carved out of rough roots. The wood-carving statues of the Goddess of Mercy sold in the shops outside the Puji Temple are mostly made of little-leaf box wood.

1. All are root-carvings, from the image of the Goddess of Mercy to the screens, sign boards and couplets.
2. A three-metre-high root-carving statue of Goddess of Mercy stands on the top floor of the pavilion.
3. The carving of the “Child-delivering Goddess of Mercy” is very ingenious in concept and material selection.
4. The Pavilion of the Goddess of Mercy houses an exhibition of root-carving statues of the Goddess of Mercy.





1. Pilgrims prostrate themselves every step of the way from the Fayu Temple to the Huiji Temple.
2. Huiji Monastery is one of the three major temples at Putuo along with the Puji and Fayu temples. (by Ye Wenqing)
3. Pantuo Rock, an epitome of Mount Putuo
4. The Workers' Sanatorium is also open to tourists.
5. Passenger ships go between Shanghai and Putuo.



Not All Is Perfect in the Buddhist Kingdom

My three-day experience in this Buddhist kingdom on the sea was a most rewarding one. My heart was happy, having walked barefooted on sandy beaches, feasted my eyes on the seething fury of pounding waves, and marvelled at the maidenly goddess and the wise and kind face of Tathagata. However, there were also things that caused me some anxiety.

For instance, the moment I had set foot on the dock at the island I was mobbed by smooth-talking local women with smiling faces trying to persuade me to stay at their inns. One of them practically carried me to her household inn, but as soon as I went in, her expression changed. First she raised the rent she had quoted, then all of a sudden there was no hot water in the shower. When I protested, she told me I could leave — just what I wanted to do, but fatigue and the imminent darkness got the better of me, so I put up with it. The cook she hired from northern Anhui simply did not look like a cook. The seafood he prepared was either overdone or too raw to be stomachached. When I protested once again the inn-keeper simply taunted me for being a “country bumpkin”.

Early the next morning I packed up my luggage and fled. It was rainy and windy. Feeling cold I ducked into a restaurant at the other end of the village and immediately pulled the door shut. Before I realised what was happening, the clatter of a mahjong game in the room came to a sudden stop, and a swarthy middle-aged man rushed up, flailing his arms in a threatening way. “Didn’t you see the door was broken? Are you looking for trouble?” Luckily the other people in the house persuaded him to retreat, but in doing so he kept hurling angry words at me. Perhaps it was my imposing height that prevented a more miserable outcome here.

The people here are all new to the tourist industry, having simply lived off fishing on the rough sea for so many generations. Hopefully, with the passage of time, they will learn more amiable ways of dealing with tourists, and



tourists will not leave with such bad impressions.

There were a few monks in this religious sanctuary with some uncharacteristic traits too. Every now and then I would come across a monk shouting huskily to people for their curiosity about the closed temple rooms. Once when a group of young monks coming out of a monastery caught sight of a beautiful young woman among the pilgrims, some of them leered at her and flirted with her in lecherous tones. This type of behaviour is certainly not new in this world, and perhaps it was only a couple of bad monks. But I felt somewhat awkward that all this should have taken place in the ancestral domain of the Goddess of Mercy whose mission is to deliver the multitude from misery.

Certainly more reverence and respectfulness should be forthcoming in this famed religious sanctuary.

Translated by Ling Yuan



Tips for the Traveller

Getting There

There are daily flights between Hong Kong and Ningbo, where ferries are available to take the traveller to Mount Putuo. You may also sail from Shanghai to Mount Putuo. From Hangzhou, you can travel to Ningbo by air-conditioned bus or train, and then catch a ferry boat.

Getting Around

Minibuses run along a circular route to most of the temples and scenic spots. You may also take a bus to the top of the Mount Foding, and climb down a 1,000-step stairway to the Fayu Temple. The Pantuo Rock and the Rocks of Twin Turtles Listening to a Sermon can be reached only on foot. You may disembark at the Purple Bamboo Grove Nunnery and walk over to the Canyon Cave. There are ferries to Mt. Luojia.

Lodging

The Puji Monastery, situated in the centre of Mount Putuo, is surrounded by many hotels and inns, with room rates averaging between 60 and 150 yuan. The highest quality one is Xilai Villa, at 300 yuan. There are also hotels and mountain villas outside the Fayu Temple. There are inns in the fishing villages as well, where the room rate fluctuates with the season between 60 and 120 yuan, but beware of tricksters.

Food

There are many food stalls on the island offering mostly seafood prepared in the Ningbo style. Make sure to bargain before you sit down to avoid being overcharged. Big restaurants on the island offer better dishes, and food is served in hotels. The Puji Monastery dining room serves three meals a day for an unbelievable price of five yuan.





ZHUJIAJIAN — A CELESTIAL MOUNTAIN ON THE SEA

This is mainly a holiday resort. With an airport, it also plays an important role in air transportation in this area.



Baishan (White Mountain): Bizarre Rocks Everywhere

White Mountain stands at the northern tip of Zhujiajian Island, not far from the airport and the two piers for ferries to Shengjamen and Mount Putuo respectively. It is not a high mountain but has various bizarre rocks of different sizes. A few of the rocks are pointed, but most are round and smooth. Some huge boulders lie one above the other, balancing like acrobats. From the top of the White Mountain, you can view the beautiful Mount Putuo and the statue of the Goddess of Mercy.



Dawushi Bay: Shiny Black Stones

From White Mountain through Zhujiajian Town, the bus takes visitors eastward to Zhangzhou Bay where you can enjoy scenes of fishing villages and delicious seafood at reasonable prices. An unusual and interesting thing to do also in this area is to go for a walk on the smooth, round, broad-bean-sized stones in the Dawushi (Big Black Stone) Bay. Wet by sea water, these black stones glitter in the sun. The sea waves wash and splash against the stones, creating crisp clatters. Walking barefoot on these black pebbles is like having a foot massage.





hili Jinsha (Golden Sand Beach): Holiday Delight

Every summer, the Golden Sand Beach on Zhujiajian is packed with visitors, mostly from Shanghai, Hangzhou, Ningbo and other large cities. They come here on holiday to enjoy the water and the reefs. The five-kilometre long Golden Sand Beach is actually formed by the beaches of the East Sand, North Sand, Thousand Sand, Black Sand and Blue Sand. Each resembling a crescent moon, the five of them connect end to end. Since tourists scatter on different parts of the five beaches, it is usually not crowded.



Daqing (Big Blue) Mountain: Clouds and a Stone River

South of the Golden Sand Beach, the Big Blue Mountain rises dramatically over 300 metres above sea level. This highest peak on the island is very steep and most often enshrouded in clouds. From its top you can have a panoramic view of the Golden Sand Beach. A most spectacular feature on this mountain is the "stone river" where rolling boulders lie from mid-mountain down to its foot. In the evening mist, many visitors think that these grey, round boulders resemble a flock of sheep carefully making their way down the mountain.



Tips for the Traveller

Transport: There are flights from Shanghai and Hangzhou, and ferries from Shengjiamen and Mount Putuo. Ten scheduled ferries sail between Shengjiamen and Zhujiajian. Between scenic spots, motor-tricycles, taxis and special route minibuses are available.

Accommodation: There are holiday inns on the Golden Sand Beach and about 10 hotels and hostels in Zhujiajian Town. The room rates vary between 60 yuan and 120 yuan, and are equipped with baths and IDD telephones.

Food: There is a food street in Zhujiajian Town, and most restaurants serve relatively inexpensive seafood in Ningbo style.

Best season: From June to September.

1. Due to its strange-shaped stones, the White Mountain is known as the "Fairy Mountain on the Sea".
2. Viewing the Golden Sand Beach from the top of the Big Blue Mountain. (by Ye Wenqing)
3. It has become the trend nowadays to cultivate marine products in the shallow sea. (by Ye Wenqing)
4. The regular ferry sails between Zhujiajian and Shengjiamen every 30 minutes.
5. The peak on the right is the main peak of the White Mountain



TAOHUA ISLAND: HIDING PLACE OF A FICTIONAL HERO?

Huang Yaoshi, a legendary character created by Louis Cha in his novels, is depicted as an extraordinarily intelligent strategist as well as a gallant martial arts master; and, according to the author, this hero's mysterious hiding place is on the Taohua Island in the East China Sea.



Xuanbogu Mountain: Imposing Cliffs on the Sea

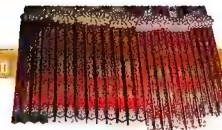
It can be reached by taking a ferry from Shengjamen. Obviously, Taohua (Peach Flower) Island has become a famous tourist spot due to Louis Cha's novels. So, among the ferries, one is named *Jin Yong*, the author's pen name in his own handwriting. From the pier, minibuses will take you to the Xuanbogu Mountain Scenic Area, where a TV set of the "Qing-dynasty Ancient City" has been established. Walking along the sea shore in the area, you will also see the most fantastic rocks that bear such names as "Dragon's Teeth Holding Up the Sky", "Seal Reefs" and "Conch Reefs".



Tawan Bay: Magic Pearl Upon the Waves

Again, from the pier, you can reach Taohua Town, from where you change to another bus heading for Tawan Bay. There is a big beach with fine sand. Walking along the seaside road to the right, you will see a huge stone pillar standing in the valley, backing the sea. Because of its unique location and imposing feature, the rock has been given the name "Dragon-Girl Peak". On the other side of the bay, there is another miracle created by nature — the "Magic Pearl" which is actually a round boulder polished by the waves.

Anqi Peak, rising 539 meters above sea level on Taohua Island, is the highest point along the East China Sea coast. There are many strange boulders on the mountain. Most amazing are those of granite eroded by the wind and rain. A legend says that in ancient times a hermit named Scholar Anqi tried to make immortality pills on the mountain, thus there is the new scenic spot called "Immortality Pill Cave".



Big Buddha Head Peak and 'Traces' of Huang Yaoshi

At the northwest point of the island there rises a peak called Dafotou or Big Buddha Head, which got its name because the peak resembles the Buddha's Head. The residence of the legendary Huang Yaoshi lies on the eastern slope of the mountain. This newly established "relic" is not big in scale. It appears that neither in design nor contents it does not have much to offer to tourists. Admirers of the hero in the novels will definitely feel disappointed.



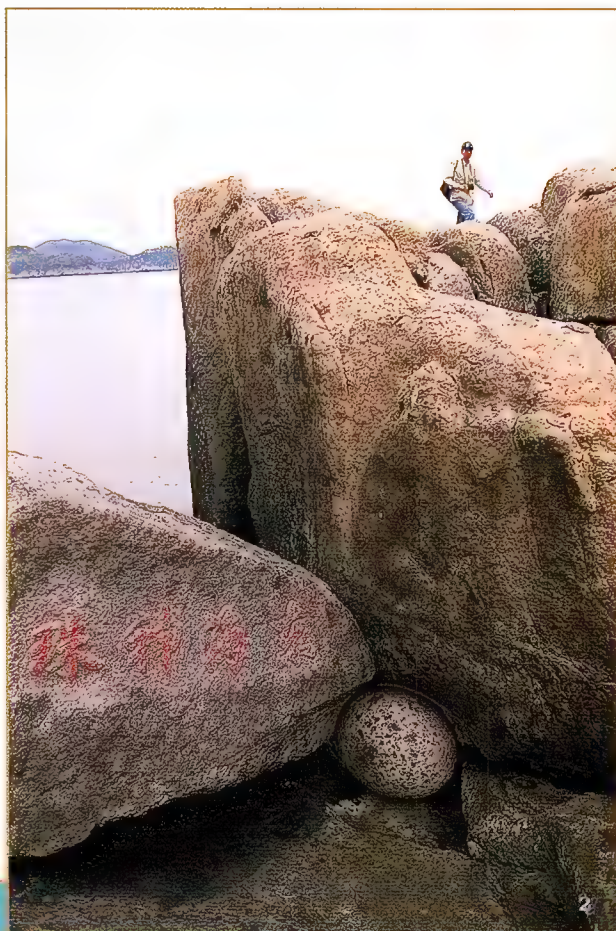
Tips for the Traveller:

Transport: Every day five scheduled boats sail between Shenjiamen and Taohua Island. On the island there are taxis, motor-tricycles and special route mini-buses.

Accommodation: There are hotels, inns and restaurants on the island. Since the island is small, it is possible to do a one-day trip.

Best seasons for tourism: spring and summer.

1. Strange reefs in the sea around Xuanbogu Mountain
2. The "Magic Pearl" is formed by tides that have risen and fallen for thousands of years.
3. "Dragon Tooth Holding Up the Sky"



SHENJIAMEN: A LONG SEAFOOD STREET

沈家門鎮
Shenjiamen Town



Shenjiamen was a fishing harbour in the early days. It became a busy fish market each time the fishing boats returned. In those days, most of the seafood consumed in the big cities like Shanghai and Hangzhou came from here. Today, Mount Putuo, Zhujiajian and Taohua islands have become the three main tourist spots in the area, and Shenjiamen has developed into a tourist ferry for visiting the three islands. With increasing numbers of regular boats, the ferry has also been enlarged. Every summer, Shenjiamen is packed with visitors.

Visitors stop at Shenjiamen not simply in transit but also for the seafood. Starting from Pier No.2 to the bus station, the road stretching 1.5 kilometres along the Shenjiamen Harbour is full with food stalls every night. With lights on and owners and attendants standing in front



of their stalls to welcome customers, the busy scenes usually last till three or four o'clock in the morning.

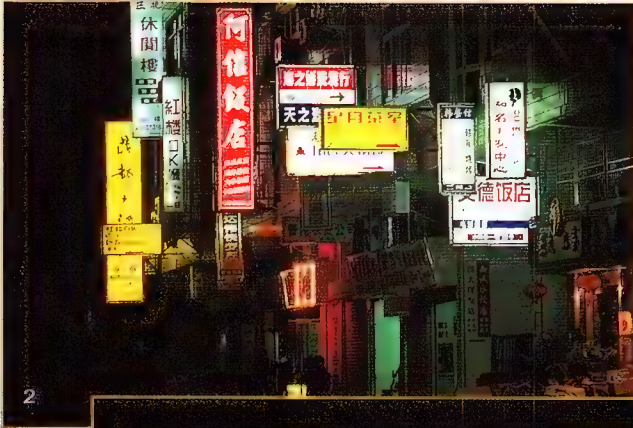
Fish, crabs, prawns, oysters, shells, snails and various vegetables are placed live on plates. Customers order their food simply by pointing to the plates; no menu is needed. The price is quite cheap — 50 yuan for a one-kilo grouper!

Those who shy away from stall food may try the seafood restaurants on this street. Some of the dishes served in the restaurants are even cheaper than those at the food stalls, and the quality is much better.

If you want to buy some seafood to take home, it's very convenient! There are many seafood supermarkets here selling dried sea eels, yellow croaker, white baits and dried scallops.

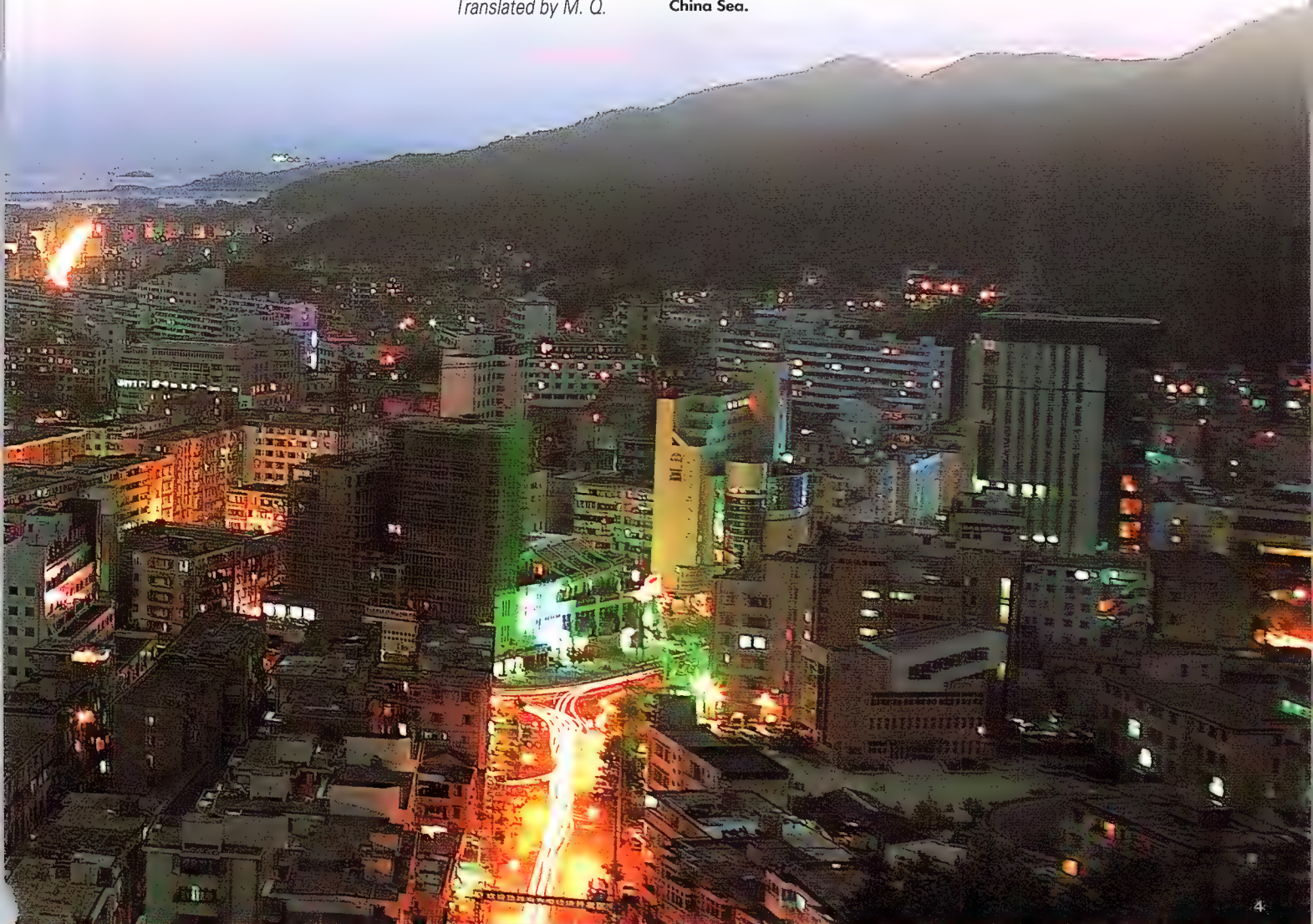
As the hub of the waterways, Shenjiamen has regular ferries going to Mount Putuo every 30 minutes (from Banshengdong Pier), to Zhujiajian 10 scheduled ferries each day (Banshengdong Pier) and to Taohua Island three a day (from No. 2 Pier). In addition, there are large passenger ships sailing between Shenjiamen and Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou and Zhoushan Island (from Duntou Passenger Pier).

In Shenjiamen, there are hotels of different grades and also inexpensive hostels and inns.



1. There is a large seafood market in Shenjiamen.
2. Shenjiamen, a former fishing village, now an attractive tourist spot
3. Numerous food stalls are established along the harbour every night.
4. Shenjiamen is now an important transportation harbour on the East China Sea.

Translated by M. Q.





TWO VISITS TO BITA LAKE

Photos & article by Yi Yangdong



The sun was rising as I made my way to the bus station of Zhongdian in northwest Yunnan Province. At about 7:00 a.m., I got on a crowded shuttle bus towards Baishuitai (White Water Terrace) in Sanba Township. Images of Bita Lake seen on television a month ago swept excitedly through my mind: the mysterious morning haze; the lake water as green as jade...

The Bita Lake Nature Reserve is 20 kilometres southeast of Zhongdian. Along the highway are quiet pasture-lands dotted with Tibetan dwellings; but no sheep nor cattle were roaming in the morning mist; only cooking smoke curled up from the rooftops in this world of peace and serenity.

At Shuangqiao I got off the bus and reached the entrance to the reserve. Having learned that the Bita Lake lay seven kilometres down along the highway, I hired a horse and went into the mountains eagerly.

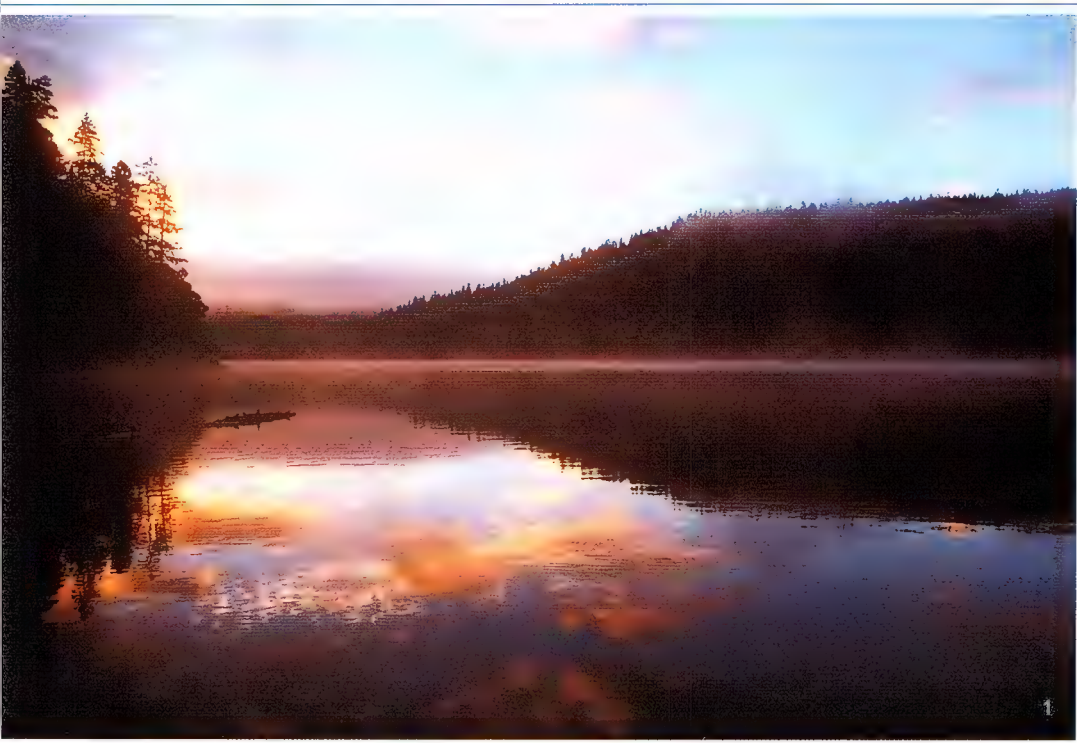
A Slow Horse

The path to the lake, jammed between two mountains, was

1. Boats are provided for tourists to hire.
2. Entering the scenic area by riding a horse
3. Karakal Peak and the Mingyongqia Glacier at its foot







sometimes so narrow that only one horse could pass. Flanking the winding path were thick forests occasionally dotted with autumn leaves standing out vividly in an otherwise green world. The sounds of the horse hoofs and the gurgling streams mingled to create a captivating symphony.

Unknowingly, an hour passed and after another turn, my eyes brightened upon seeing a vast grassland blanketed with rolling waves of golden grass stretching into the horizon. Eagerly I urged the horse to run, but the beast simply ignored me and carried on at its slow pace. Across the pasture-land, near the base of the mountain, I saw a wood cabin, the travellers' centre. I was surprised to see several groups of people had already arrived. Some were taking pictures, while others enjoyed fresh milk at the cabin.

After my own short rest and more trekking, I finally dismounted at the Bita Lake and arranged the return time with the horse owner.

Ancient Oaks and Azaleas

Bita is a Tibetan word meaning the place where thick forests of oak trees stand. The Bita Lake is embraced on all sides by hills covered with ancient oaks and sturdy pine trees. In mid-June the wild azaleas on the shores of the lake burst into full bloom, presenting a spectacular sight. The Bita Lake Nature Reserve covers an area of 1,418 hectares. Nestled in the centre of the reserve at 3,500 metres above sea level, the lake spreads out in a huge bat shape, 3,000 by 700 metres. An island in the lake originally had a palace on it, built by a local tribal leader named Mu during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), but today only ruins are left.

Fed by mountain springs, the lake water is unusually clear. In fine weather, boat-rowers can see down more than 10 metres and find the Double-lipped fish — an ancient species left behind by the glacial age of the Quaternary Period.

By the woods at the western end of the lake stood a row of simple, yet elegant wooden cabins with white walls and vermillion eaves — this was the Bita Lake Hotel.

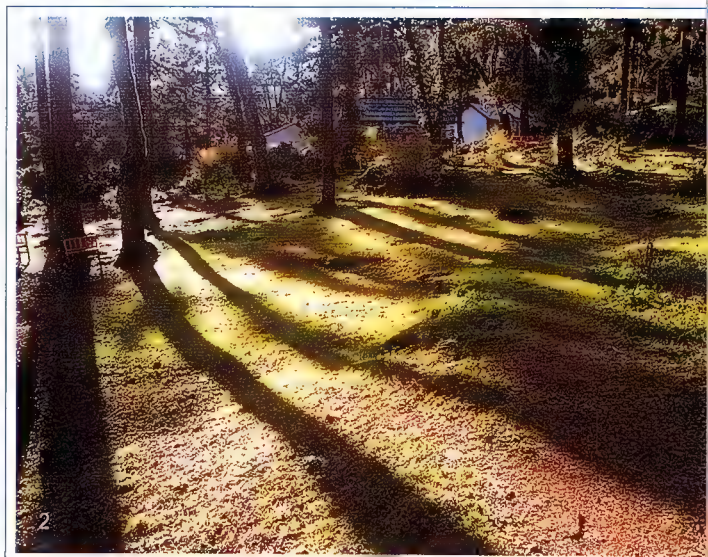
A Hospitable Tibetan

Immediately after checking into the inn, I set out with my camera and tripod. Since it was still early, I decided to go around the lake. Along the lakeside path, I went through dense woods to a patch of gently-sloping grassland which stretched from the foot of the mountain all the

way down into the heart of the lake. From the shore, I could clearly see the verdant grass under the water.

Here I ran into a Tibetan horse-tender and we chatted as friends would. When I left, he warm-heartedly pointed out a short cut for me and insisted accompanying me for some distance, to be sure I would not get lost. I thanked him genuinely and he smiled: "It's my pleasure. You've come all the way here and I'm only pleased to help." His sincerity and hospitality deeply impressed me.

Soon dusk descended and I realised that I had done only one-fourth of my planned walk. I abandoned my lake-circling plan and went back the way I had come.



Morning Brings New Views

Before dawn the following morning, I was at the lakeside again. The lake water appeared as dark as ink and a thin layer of gauze-like mist drifted over the water. In the morning breeze, the mist scattered and gathered, changing shape and thickness all the time. Occasionally one or two wild ducks could be spotted flapping their wings and dashing away, leaving behind a trail of splashing water



and ripples. Such a sight was a happy surprise.

"My, it is really beautiful!" I turned as I heard this remark behind me, and found Mr. and Mrs. Wu, whom I had met last night, at the lakeside. The sun was just rising and the morning glow spilled out into golden rays.

The Wus were in high spirits. Having seen the sunrise, they wanted to row all the way to the island to look at the palace ruins. The boat-rental manager offered us a special rate of only one hour's fee for the entire morning. Quickly the Wus jumped into a boat, but I decided to stay ashore and take more pictures of the beautiful sights on land.

Pleasure time always runs fast and the time to leave came all too quickly.

Songs of Happiness

Unexpectedly I was back at Bita Lake for a second time just several days later, together with a few friends I had met at the Meili Snow Mountain.

As I sat in my hotel room, I heard a high-pitched voice singing a

beautiful song just outside: "I have seen mountains after mountains and mountains. Where the mountains join together is the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau..." The tune was melodious and the voice strong, lolling me into the mood of the rolling mountains. Tibetans love singing and do it often. In fact, since my first day in Zhongdian, I had not had a single day without hearing singing. At a typical Tibetan-style hotel where I stayed in Zhongdian, I heard exactly the same song, sung by the porter, who began singing immediately after closing my door.

Lost in the Beauty

We set out just after sunrise the next morning and went straight to the distant grassland. The vast grassland was true beauty. The sun penetrated the thick foliage of trees to cast its dazzling rays on the ground. Clouds girdled half way up the mountain. The grass gently rolled to the lakeside where horses grazed leisurely. It had a simple, natural charm.

The dreamy scenes at Bita Lake made me forget the time again. I missed my appointment with the young lady in the hotel shop to watch her make buttered tea this morning. Nevertheless, I did not miss the chance to drink this aromatic, hot tea.

It was again time to leave. I turned back and looked at the jade lake once more before going.



Translated by F. Huang



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1. The picturesque Bita Lake
2. The living quarters in the scenic area
3. Local Tibetan pupils
4. Double-lipped fish, an ancient species of the Quaternary Period
5. In the morning, the lake is covered in drifting light mist.
6. Making friends at Bita Lake





PICTURE OF 100 CHILDREN REDISCOVERED

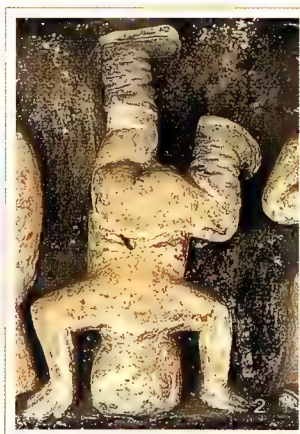
Photos by Chen Jin and Zhang Jinneng Article by Ye Nong

News of the 'Picture of 100 Children'

At a dinner in Luzhou, a famous liquor producer in Sichuan Province, as we were discussing the history and culture of liquor, one of our elderly hosts mentioned the "Picture of 100 Children of King Wen" which, considered lost a long time, had been rediscovered in a limestone cave in Zhongshan Hill. Though it is called "picture", it is actually images of 100 children carved vividly in bas-relief into the stone walls, including some drinking liquor.

There should be no doubt about the existence of this picture because it is included in the authoritative *Dictionary of Famous Places and Relics in China*, published in Shanghai 10 years ago. But also in this book, the entry says that this art work had been destroyed.

The next day, with a local guide, we went to visit the cave housing this valuable relic. The Zhongshan Hill where the cave is described to be located has now been flattened for a highway. But the cave is still there, just below the infrastructure and well preserved. At the entrance of the limestone cave, three vaguely discernible characters — *Di Ru Ya* (Milk Dripping Cave) — written by Huang Tingjian, a well-known calligrapher and artist in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), are carved on the cliff. In the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the famous calligrapher Huang Yunhao had a temple, named Shibao, built there. Later, the temple's name was changed to Yungu (Cloud Valley) Cave and a stone tablet inscribed with historical records of the cave was erected inside. Thus these carvings should be authentic and carved no later than the Song Dynasty.





As its name suggests, there are 100 carved images on one of the walls inside the cave. In these marvellous carvings of children the techniques used are simple and plain, and the images — riding horses, doing handstand, performing martial arts and drinking liquor from huge containers — are extremely vivid. Moreover, they all reflect a sort of childish naiveté and humour. This beautiful art work gave a vivid expression of the folk games and social life of its time.

Preserved by Becoming a Blackboard

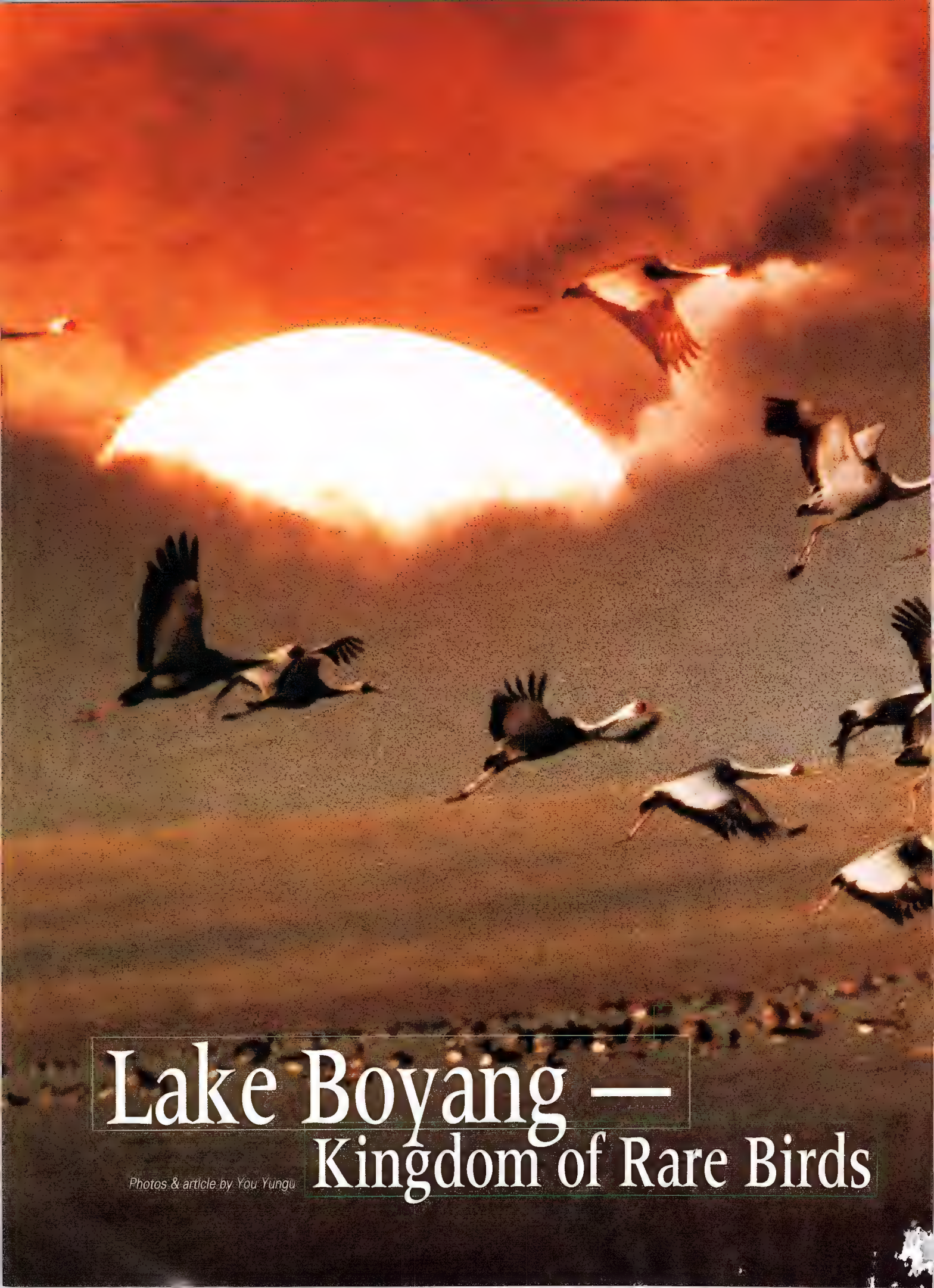
During the “cultural revolution” in the 1960s many old and rare cultural relics were destroyed. The local people attributed the preservation of this masterpiece of stone carving to a primary school teacher who loved to paint the images of the picture. This teacher, showing great resourcefulness, plastered over the carvings and painted the flat surface black to make it into a blackboard. For an even more convincing effect, he then turned the dilapidated ancient temple into a classroom. Thus the picture was saved from destruction, but the teacher later moved away and no-one else had a clue about what had happened to it. It was not until the authorities in Luzhou launched a thorough survey of cultural relics within its boundaries that someone contacted the teacher who had saved the picture. Only then was the “Picture of 100 Children of King Wen” brought to light again.



Translated by Z. G. Li

1. The bas-relief carvings of the “Picture of 100 Children of King Wen”
2. Doing handstand 3. Wagering while drinking
4. Performing illusory tricks for entertainment 5. Playing with a giant dragon on a festival day





Lake Boyang — Kingdom of Rare Birds

Photos & article by You Yungu



The section of Boyang Lake that is a water paradise for swans has been named Swan Lake.





For many years, I have gone back again and again to Lake Boyang. Wucheng is a quaint, sleepy little town located at the confluence of the Xiuhe and Zhenjiang rivers and Lake Boyang in Jiangxi Province, surrounded by nine inland lakes. During the winter, a large number of fish, shrimps, snails and shellfish are stranded in the shallow waters on the lake edge amid a luxuriant growth of marsh plants, providing an abundant source of food for white cranes and other migratory birds. Favoured by a mild climate, clean water and perfect environmental conditions, the area has become a favourite place for many rare migratory birds to pass the winter. It has thus become the Lake Boyang Migratory Birds Reserve.

In recent years, visitors from many countries, including Britain, Canada, Japan and the United States, have come continually to Lake Boyang to watch the cranes, admiring the beautiful local natural scenery and seeking blessings. The crane is a "divine bird" in many fairy tales in the world and a symbol of good luck, longevity and peace. A few years ago, a Japanese woman named Ota Biko came with her husband; they had no children in 13 years of marriage. She became pregnant in Wucheng and gave birth to a handsome baby back in Japan, whom they named Wusei (born in Wucheng). When the baby was two years old, they came again with their child to seek a blessing so that the child could grow up healthy and strong.

Previous page: The perfect environment has made Lake Boyang a paradise for birds.

1. The part of Lake Boyang inhabited by innumerable swans is called "Swan Lake".
2. The bird-watching season at Lake Boyang is five months long from spring to autumn.
3. Big swans paddle on the lake.



Swans — Faithful Lovers

Swans are a type of large waterfowl under second-degree state protection. The whooper, whistling and mute swans are native to China. Their pure white plumage and graceful body give an impression of nobility.

The whooper swan can reach a length of 1.5 metres and a weight of more than 10 kilograms, and the whistling swan, a length of 1 metre and 5-7 kilograms. The mute swan has a black growth under its bill and a very long neck, which forms an "S" while the bird swimming, unlike that of the two other species, which keep their necks erect.

Of all the birds in the world, swans are the most faithful lovers. A male and female pair will always stay together throughout their lives. When one of them dies, the other will live a single life until the end of its days.

The Cranes Became White Dots

One day in December 1984, I arrived in Wucheng in Yongxiu County for the first time to photograph the cranes. I began to explore the lakes, such as the Great Lake and Clam Lake, and the marshes in the vicinity, all of which are a paradise for the white cranes during migration. Through my long telephoto lens, I saw for the first time a flock of white cranes at the centre of the Great Lake. In the sunlight, their pure white feathers gleamed like silvery pearls against the green water of the lake. Very excited, I walked eagerly through the marsh, keeping low to get closer undetected. At 600-700 metres away, the vigilant cranes spotted me, looked around and then, with their necks extended, dashed off in flight. I hurriedly put up my tripod in the mud but the telephoto lens was not long enough. The cranes became a large number of white dots in the photographs.

Thrown from an Ox Cart Blind

Enchanted by the white cranes, I quickly borrowed a 1,000mm zoom lens. A villager in Dingjia Village on the lake told me that cranes were not afraid of cows and often came near their grazing herd. They were not alarmed even by a man riding an ox or driving an ox cart, so I could try an ox cart blind.

I rented a large ox cart, concealing myself in a big pile of straw on the cart while the owner rode on the back of the ox. We approached the cranes stealthily and luckily we were downwind that day. About 200 metres from the flock, through the zoom, I could see lively pictures of them romping around, flapping their wings and dancing here and there. Laying on my stomach in the straw I kept on pressing the shutter. The cranes became suspicious and started moving away. We followed them, but I was thrown out of the cart onto the marsh when we hit a large bump. The cranes all quickly took to the air and were already far up in the sky by the time I climbed back onto the cart.

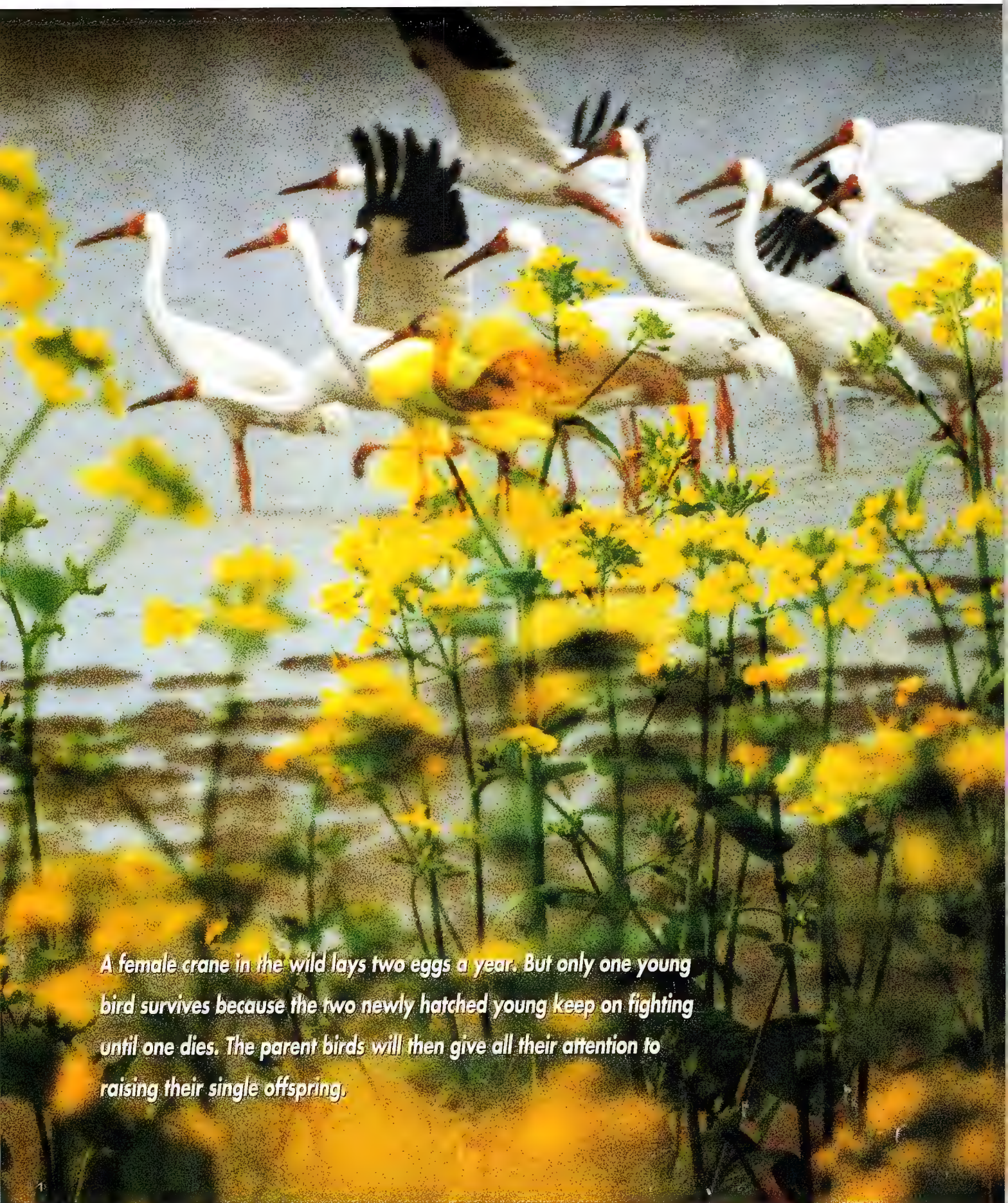
1. With so many wild geese in the sky, this white crane looks lonely.

2. Supper time for the cranes



Laying concealed in a pile of straw on an ox cart, I moved closer to the white cranes, continually pressing the camera shutter. Unfortunately, the cart bumped over a ditch and I was thrown on the ground. The cranes, who were already suspicious, quickly flapped their wings into flight.





A female crane in the wild lays two eggs a year. But only one young bird survives because the two newly hatched young keep on fighting until one dies. The parent birds will then give all their attention to raising their single offspring.



Cranes — Romantic Courting

Cranes, the general name for birds belonging to the family Gruidae, are large wading birds similar to the heron and stork in appearance. They have long bills, wings and shanks, and short toes. Cranes live close to water on the plains or in marshlands and feed on small animals and plants.

In China, well loved by people, the crane is a symbol of good luck and longevity. It holds an important place in China's long history of culture and is the subject of poems, paintings and embroidery. In the past, even the court robes of high officials were embroidered with crane designs.

The cranes are strictly monogamous. Mating between close relatives is instinctively avoided. During the mating season, the male struts, dances and shrieks before the female until they become partners. Young cranes grow up very quickly. They are able to walk about 20 hours after hatching, and fly south with their parents for the winter in the same year.

Cooped Up, Ready to Shoot

After the success with the ox cart, my interest in photographing the cranes increased. The local villagers suggested another type of blind — a pit similar to a war bunker. They dug a pit of four square metres on the lake edge and covered it with a bamboo frame and grass for me. I could be perfectly concealed.

There was a heavy fog early the next morning. With biscuits and tinned fruit, I slipped into the blind before daylight and waited until 11:00 a.m. The fog still did not disperse; the cranes were not visible, yet I could hear their cries. After noon, when the sunlight pierced the heavy fog, flocks of cranes arrived. They circled in the air, shrieking over my blind before they dropped to the ground in front. In the fog the cranes presented a misty picture of a divine realm for my camera. When the fog eventually dispersed, there was a mix of white cranes and swans; while

the swans glided on the water, the cranes stood by on their long legs watching for food. Some wild geese and ducks swooped past overhead like sudden storms. The blind offered me a rare opportunity to photograph the birds but it was truly uncomfortable. I was cooped up in it, unable to smoke, nor make any noise, nor move on the wet ground; my feet became numb.

1. Cultivated fields on the edge of Lake Boyang
2. A pair of white-napped cranes in a joyous dance
3. Thousands of cranes come here every year to pass the winter.



A Crane Family of Three

While taking photographs, I found out that in a flock of several hundred cranes gathered together in one place, there are families, newlyweds and courting couples, as well as singles among them. I learned many interesting facts too. For example, a male crane will furiously defend his family. Once when I saw a female crane feeding her offspring with a madder root or wild water chestnut held between her long bills, a single crane intruded into their territory. The male crane immediately drove the intruder away.

In the winter of 1985, when George W. Archibald, president of the International Cranes Foundation, came to Jiangxi on a research trip, I went with him to Lake Boyang. In those 10 days, he taught me a great deal about birds. A crane family consists of the parent birds and one offspring. A female crane in the wild lays two eggs a year. But only one young bird survives because the two newly hatched young keep on fighting until one dies. The parent birds will then give all their attention to raising their single offspring. While the male parent in the family of three keeps a lookout and stands guard, the female bird looks for food and feeds the young one. The male and female birds sometimes echo each other's cries and offer each other food. When the whole family has eaten their fill, they then frolic in the water.



The Photography of Cranes

Photographing cranes is a highly difficult task. The photographer needs a 500mm or 1,000mm zoom and a sturdy tripod. Photography can be done in the following ways: 1. Waiting in a blind for the cranes to come close; 2. Moving closer to the cranes concealed in a vehicle or boat for close-ups and wide-angle shots; 3. Camouflaged in a white hood, walking forward slowly towards the cranes. If at any time the cranes raise their heads in alarm, the photographer must become immobile and quiet, and wait for the cranes to feel safe again.

1. The author hiding in a grass-covered blind
2. Taking photographs from a camouflaged ox cart
3. Swan Lake



As the boat moved still closer, I could see more details and drama. Some were spreading their wings; others were cleaning their feathers; still others were dancing in the water and making big splashes.



In Chinese mythology, the swan is a "fairy" among the birds. For its nobility, the swan is worshipped by the common people and admired by emperors and kings. The statutes of the Yuan Dynasty clearly stipulated that hunting swans was strictly prohibited; today, the swan is a protected species in China.



White cranes, swans and wild geese live together in peace.



Bread-eating Gulls in Kunming

Gulls belong to the family *Latidae*. The most frequently seen species in China are the sea gull, swallow-tailed gull and red-billed gull. The migratory sea gulls have grey upper-body feathers and white feathers on the lower part, and grow to a length of 45 centimetres. In recent decades, a large number of Siberian red-beak gulls have been staying in Kunming. The people of Kunming love them and gladly feed them large quantities of bread.



The 'Symphony' on Lake Boyang

One year, I stayed at Dingjia Village for over a month and made many friends among the villagers; they called me "the crane reporter". A villager named Xiong said to me one day, "Crane reporter, go and photograph the swans at Swan Lake, northwest of here. I'll carry your gear for you." I gladly accepted the offer and we set out immediately; we passed by Wucheng and crossed the Ganjiang River to reach the shore of Medium Lake, a distance of over 20 kilometres. By that time it was already after sunset and too dark for photography.

The owner of the house where we stayed, named Fan, was a cousin of Xiong's. As they chatted intimately about family and their hometown, I stole out of the house and walked onto the embankment.

The moon was bright and the stars were few. The echoing cries of the swans on the lake formed a joyous "symphony" on Lake Boyang, which reminded me of the ballet *Swan Lake* composed by Tchaikovsky and danced by Ulanova. Strolling along the deserted embankment, many beautiful pictures of swans came to mind. In Chinese mythology, the swan is a "fairy" among the birds who often flies towards the sun and glides back down, bringing blessings to the human world. For its nobility, the swan is worshipped by the common people and admired by emperors and kings. Chapter 13 of the statutes of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) clearly stipulated that hunting swans was strictly prohibited. Today, the swan is a protected species in China.

A Boat Blind for Close-ups

At daybreak the following day I was ready with my cameras, waiting on the embankment. As the sun rose, I saw Fan pushing a small fishing boat towards me. He concealed me in the boat cabin with only the zoom visible.

Fan was dressed in a water-proof suit like a warrior. Before departing, he whispered to me, "Don't cough, smoke or expose any part of you." He himself hid behind the boat rudder and began to push the boat forward slowly so as not to alarm the swans. The boat glided slowly closer and closer to the swans. In the view-finder, I could see their beautiful shapes. Their snow-white feathers, red beaks, and long curving necks were unusually pretty against the background of blue sky, green water, and grass. As the boat moved still closer, I could see more details and drama. Some were spreading their wings; others were cleaning their feathers; still others were dancing in the water and making big splashes. I took one fascinating photograph after another.

It was, however, hard work for Fan. Although he was pushing the boat in ice-cold water, his forehead was covered with sweat and steam was evaporating from his head. Finally, the waves from the boat alarmed the swans and they raised their heads; then, with necks extended, they rose from the water, propelled themselves forward in a dozen or so steps and took to the air. Those were the last images I captured on film.

Bird-Watching Sites in China

On the vast Chinese territory, there are many places ideal for birds to live or to take as their migratory homes.

The Zhalong Nature Reserve, Heilongjiang

The Zhalong Nature Reserve on the Lilin Steppe at the edge of the Songjiang Plain in Northeast China is a preservation zone of 42,000 hectares. The relatively inaccessible reed and sedge swamps provide favourable conditions for the survival and regeneration of red-crowned cranes and other waterfowl.

There are altogether 269 species of waterfowl in the reserve, including six species of cranes, thus it is fondly called "the home of cranes". The reserve has successfully domesticated red-crowned cranes and provides them with food and a home for winter. As a result, some of the visiting cranes have also changed from migratory to resident birds.

Zhalong in Heilongjiang Province is 26 kilometres from Qiqihar. Special transportation and lodging are provided there for visitors.

中國部分觀鳥地分佈示意圖 Sketch Map of Bird-viewing Sites in China



The Xianghai Nature Reserve, Jilin

The Xianghai Nature Reserve, 105,467 hectares of wetlands, is located in Tongyu County, Jilin Province. Although there are 286 species of birds here, the emphasis is on the protection of six species of cranes, including the red-crowned and white cranes, and other internationally endangered birds, such as the great bustards and Jankowski's bunting. April is the time to see the six species of cranes (red-crowned, white, white-napped, demoiselle, hooded and grey cranes), the oriental ibis, great bustard, Mongolian lark, sapphire-headed loon and 21 species of geese and ducks which breed there, as well as more than 30 species of sandpipers. May is the month to see Jankowski's bunting, which is only found in Xianghai.

Bird watchers can take the Beijing-Qiqihar train, get off at Kailong and drive for an hour by taking the special coach provided by the nature reserve. The locally-organised International Bird-Watching Tour here charges US\$60 per person/day to cover food, lodging and transportation.

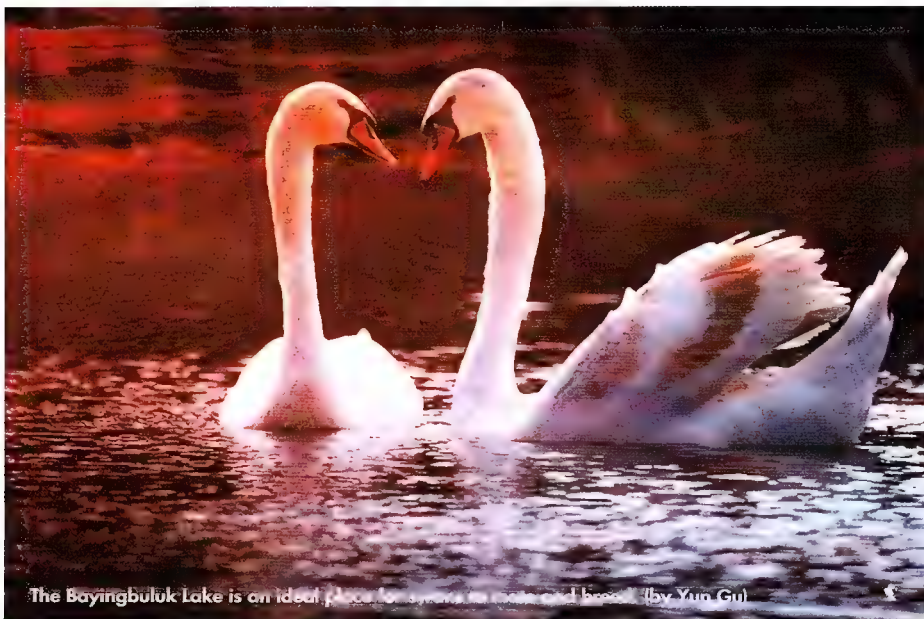
Bayingbuluk Swan Lake, Xinjiang

The Swan Lake in the Qoietusi Mountains on the Bayingbuluk Grassland is 30 kilometres long and 10 kilometres wide, and 2,400-2,600 metres above sea level. It is China's largest swan reserve.

Most of the 100 or more species of birds in this area are summer migratory birds, mainly white swans, graylag geese, cranes, bar-headed geese, mallards, cormorants and marsh harriers. Every spring, a large

number of swans fly over mountains from the Indian Ocean or Africa to nest and breed here. Three main species of swans found in China — whooper, whistling and mute swans — exist here. One-third of the total number of species of geese and ducks in China are found here. In particular, loons make up the largest number of the birds here.

There is an organised 4- or 5-day bird-watching tour from Korla City to Swan Lake, a journey of about 550 kilometres. The fee of 600 yuan per person/day includes insurance, transportation, lodging, tickets and service fees. The best season is from late June to early August.



The Bayingbuluk Lake is an ideal place for swans to nest and breed. (by Yun Gu)



Luci Isle on Qinghai Lake is home to thousands of fish hawks. (by Shi Baoxiu)

Hulun and Buir Lakes, Inner Mongolia

The Hulun Buir Grassland in northern Inner Mongolia is a sparsely populated area of rivers and streams, lakes and lagoons, swamps and marshes — an ideal habitat visited by tens of thousands of birds every spring. Ulan Lagoon near Hulun Lake and Modamuji in Xin Barag Left Banner are home to over 200 species of birds, including the red-crowned crane, white crane, whooper swan and whistling swan.

The 610-square-kilometre Buir Lake on the Sino-Mongolian border supports many species of fish and abundant water weeds, attracting large numbers of birds. The Wild Goose Island within the lake is a world of birds, such as the brown white-bellied goose, short-beaked small duck, red-crowned crane, and mandarin duck.

There are regular flights from Beijing to Hailar, and a bus from here to Modamuji, 94 kilometres away. Visitors can also join a four-day, locally-arranged bird-watching tour. To go to Wild Goose Island, it is advisable to hire a vehicle and a local guide. Also, five-day bird-watching tours to the Yueli'an area, a return trip of 600 kilometres, are organised by agencies in the city of Hailar.

The Bird Island Nature Reserve, Qinghai

The Bird Island Nature Reserve at Qinghai Lake in eastern Qinghai Province was delimited in 1975 and formally open to public in 1983. Located in Gangca County, the reserve encloses five islands — Bird Island, Haiseji, Lake Centre Hill, Three Rocks and Sand Island; and an expanse of water, sand bars and wetlands, covering an area of over 56,000 hectares.

The nature reserve is one of the eight major preservation zones for birds in China and an important breeding place for birds in Asia. In March and April every year, migratory birds, such as bar-headed geese, cranes and black-necked cranes, flock to Qinghai Lake from southern China and Southeast Asia to nest. At peak times, the number of birds exceeds 100,000, presenting a world-famous, spectacular sight.

There are 163 kinds of birds on Qinghai Lake, belonging to 35 species in 14 orders. Among the larger groups are the bar-headed goose, tufted duck, ruddy shield duck, common merganser, common goldeneye, white-eyed duck, spotbill duck, pintail and whooper swan of the family Anatidae in the order

Anseriformes; the brown-hooded gull and common gull of the family Laridae in the order Lariformes; the demoiselle crane and grey crane of the family Gruidae in the order Gruiformes; the cormorant of the family Phalacrocoracidae in the order Pelecaniformes. The most populous, thousands each, are the brown-hooded gull, common gull, tufted duck and bar-headed goose.

A lake-circling highway links the Bird Island Nature Reserve with the Qinghai-Tibet and Qinghai-Xinjiang highways. In Xining, large hotels organise tours to Qinghai Lake and Bird Island.

Gyaring and Ngoring Lakes, Qinghai

Gyaring and Ngoring lakes in Madoi County are known as "the sister lakes at the source of the Yellow River".

There are three "bird islands" in the southeastern part of Gyaring Lake, a lake of over 500 square kilometres, where every spring tens of thousands of wild geese arrive from the Indian Peninsula to nest. Ngoring Lake is 100 square kilometres larger than Gyaring and has a spot known as the "Fish Restaurant". Every spring, when the head waters dry up and the water level drops, fish are stranded on the sand bars of the Small West Lake, providing sumptuous dinners for the birds.

A bus goes from Xining to Madoi County, more than 500 kilometres away. It is a rather arduous journey.

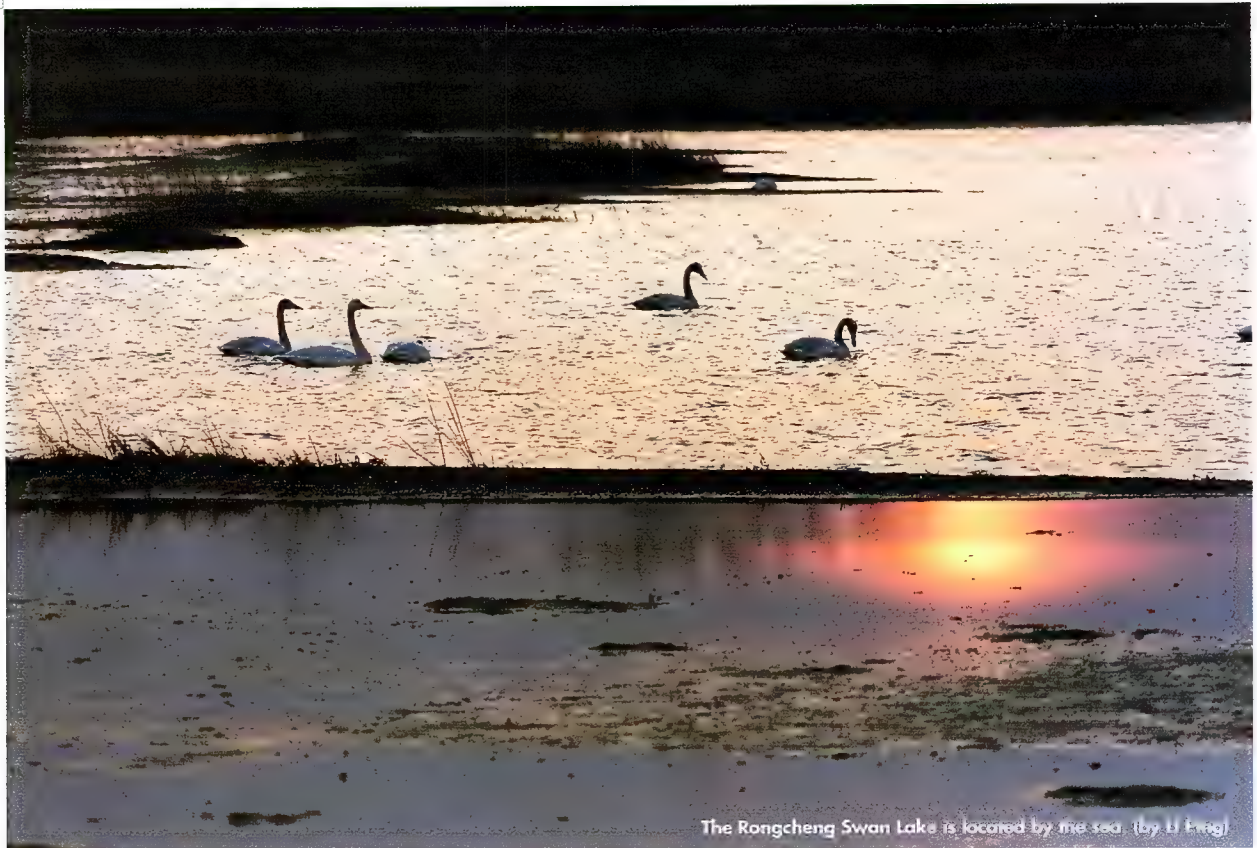
The Yellow River Delta in Dongying, Shandong

A new bird-watching place, the wetlands of the Yellow River delta are now a paradise for birds and a state-level nature reserve.

This unique natural environment now supports nearly 2,000 living things. A new bird-watching tour allows visitors to see over 200 kinds of birds, including seven species under first-degree state protection, such as the red-crowned crane, hooded crane, white stork and golden eagle and 34 species under second-degree state protection, such as the whooper swan and grey crane.

From Jinan or Qingdao in Shandong Province, visitors can take a train or drive along the expressway to Weifang, and then a bus to Dongying, 80 kilometres away. The best season for bird-watching is winter.

Bird-Watching Sites in China



The Swan Lake of Rongcheng, Shandong

Rongcheng City's famous Swan Lake is formed by a group of lagoons on a 40-kilometre-long strip of land. Every winter, about 10,000 swans come here from Xinjiang, Mongolia and Russia, turning the area into a paradise for whooper swan watchers.

There is also the Hailū (Sea Donkey) Island, a kingdom of sea gulls, about two kilometres off Rongcheng's Cape of Chengshan. The island of 1,300 square metres stands like a pinnacle in the sea with sheer precipices on all sides, providing rocky crevices for the nests of countless sea gulls.

There are regular flights from Beijing and Guangzhou to the Weibai Airport, 16 kilometres from Rongcheng. There are also direct coaches from Jinan and Yantai.

The Luya Mountain Nature Reserve, Shanxi

Located 2,772 metres above sea level at the borders of Ningwu, Wuzhai and Kelan counties, the Luya Mountain Nature Reserve covers an extensive 21,453 hectares in total.

There are 191 species and 13 subspecies of birds belonging to 47 orders and 17 families, six species of rare and endangered animals under first-degree state protection and 22 species of animals under second-degree state protection. The black stork and brown eared-pheasant are the most precious of the birds. The latter is an endangered rare species under special protection here. Brave and bellicose, with magnificent feathers, they are a favourite of bird-watchers. In 1992, there were 3,200 of them; after several years of intensified protection, their numbers have increased.

The best bird-watching season is from May to August. Go to Taiyuan first, then take a shuttle bus to Ningwu, from where a two-hour bus ride will take you to Ximafang. The nature reserve's hostel located here provides lodging at a rate of 40 yuan per night.

Lake Boyang, Jiangxi

The Lake Boyang Reserve for Migratory Birds located in northern Jiangxi Province, extending over 200 square kilometres, was delimited with state approval in 1983. On China's largest fresh-water lake the most outstanding birds are the cranes. The white cranes that come here for the winter increase every year and today, exceeding 2,800, are the largest flock in the world.

The reserve is also the winter resort of such rare birds as the white stork, black stork and whistling swan, and tens of thousands of geese, ducks and other water birds. The bird-watching season, stretching from October to April, is longer than most other places.

There are two boats daily to Lake Boyang Reserve from Nanchang. The town of Wucheng in the reserve provides lodging and guides, and rental boats.

Caohai Lake (The Sea of Grass), Guizhou

The Sea of Grass at 2,200 metres above sea level in Weining County, western Guizhou Province, is surrounded by marshes overgrown with grass, hence its name. The area is teeming with both flora and fauna. Its 25-square-kilometre water surface is home to over 120 species of birds. Every autumn, tens of thousands of water birds come to spend winter here, including several hundred black-necked cranes, the largest group found in China.

From Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou Province, visitors can take a train to Liupanshui, then a bus to Weining County, 70 kilometres away, or a direct long-distance coach from Guiyang to Weining. From Luzhou in Sichuan Province a long-distance coach goes along the 521 and 526 state highways to Weining.

Yancheng Nature Reserve for Rare Birds, Jiangsu

The Yancheng Nature Reserve for Rare Birds in Sheyang County is 453,000 hectares in total area, with a central zone of 17,400 hectares.

This reserve is an area with a large variety of animals and plants, which include 377 species of birds, 45 species of amphibious reptiles, 47 species of mammals, 281 species of fish and 450 species of plants. Among them are 11 kinds of wild life under first-degree state protection (the red-crowned crane, white-hooded crane, white crane, white stork, black stork, Chinese merganser, dolphin gull, great bustard, imperial eagle, golden eagle and Chinese paddlefish) and 67 kinds of animals under second-degree state protection, such as the black-face spoonbill, whooper swan, spotted greenshank, mandarin duck, grey crane, pied harrier, spotted seal and river deer.

The nature reserve is a main winter resort for about 1,000 red-crowned cranes, more than 60 percent of the world's wild population. Unknown until recently, it is also the breeding ground of the Saunder's gull. More than 1,000 Saunder's gulls come here to breed every year.

Yancheng is an important stop for migratory birds from Northeast Asia and Australia. Every spring and autumn, about two million birds fly past here and more than 200,000 of them stay over the winter. Among them, 62 species have been listed as endangered species by the World Federation for the Protection of Natural Resources.

From winter to early spring is the bird-watching season. Yancheng can be reached by bus from Nanjing or Shanghai. There are several three-star hotels in the area with fairly good facilities.

Cuihu Lake in Kunming, Yunnan

Since December 1984, when a large flock of Siberian red-beak gulls suddenly arrived in Kunming for the winter, the gulls come each year, creating a new tourist attraction for the city.

More than two-thirds of these gulls gather on Cuihu Lake, where they are fed by visitors. This harmonious coexistence of people and birds lasts nearly

three months every year. Smaller numbers of gulls gather at the East Wind Square, Grand View Pavilion, Folk Customs Village and White Fish Mouth.

Cuihu Lake on Kunming's northwestern outskirts can be reached on foot from the city centre. The best bird-watching season is December to February.

Huize Nature Reserve for Black-Necked Cranes, Yunnan

Huize, a famous historic and cultural town in Yunnan Province, was designated as a provincial nature reserve for black-necked cranes in 1993. The reserve is divided into two parts: Changhaizi, 49 kilometres northeast of the town, is 2,800 hectares in area and Daqiao, 54 kilometres northwest of the town, covers 4,000 hectares. The main species here are the grey cranes, and the black-necked cranes, the latter being the latest species of crane known to man. These black-necked cranes breed on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and 1,000 of them pass the winter here from mid-October to mid-March, the largest flocks in China.

The best bird-watching season is from December to February. Facilities are fairly good. A three-day trip costs 150 yuan per person/day, including transportation, food and lodging.

Maipo Nature Reserve, Hong Kong

Maipo, in the northern part of the New Territories, is Hong Kong's only marshland. After becoming a nature reserve, it has provided a reliable shelter to as many as 250 species of birds, mostly migratory birds passing Hong Kong or staying there for the winter. There are herons, sea gulls, swallow-tailed gulls, Dalmatian pelicans and other water birds as well as various coastal birds.

Maipo is a restricted zone. Visitors must apply for a special permit two weeks ahead of time. From Sheungshui railway station, visitors can take a bus to Maipo Village and then walk 20 minutes to the reserve's reception; a guide leads them to the bird-watching zone.



The Cuihu Lake in Kunming (by Lu Jianhua)

DIARY OF THE CHINA TREK

Photos by Lina Tao and Twinney Keng, Amazing Cruise and Travel, Inc.

Article by: Kenneth Keng



September 6, [Sunday]: Arrival in Beijing

Weather: Sunny; High temperature: 32°C

I am one of the 88 members of an international mountaineering and trekking delegation which arrived at the Capital Airport in Beijing aboard Flight BA039 at 9:30 this morning. Members of the delegation — men and women, the eldest at 73 and the youngest 17 — hailed from Britain, Ireland, Norway, the United States and several other countries. Everyone was running high on adrenaline for a seven-day visit to the Great Wall and other scenic spots in the outskirts of Beijing.

September 7, [Monday]: Fragrant Hills Park

Weather: Fine; High temperature: 31°C

Right after having our breakfast in the hotel, we embarked in three air-conditioned buses and set off towards the Fragrant Hills Park. It was

rush hour, and the traffic was jammed off and on, but every one was in high spirits. The guide in each bus took the opportunity to give the visitors a rundown on the history and culture of Beijing. When our motorcade drove through Tian'anmen Square, members of the delegation burst out in bravado over the magnificent rostrum and buildings around the square.

It was already 9:50 a.m. when we arrived at the starting point of a mountain path near the Sleeping Buddha Temple, outside the Fragrant Hills Park. We were running 50 minutes behind schedule. The local guide, a young man called Dahu, had been waiting there for a long time. Two ponies loaded with drinking water were kicking their hoofs impatiently. The delegation was divided into four groups and began climbing the mountain, each with a team leader.

The team members, attired in different fashions and carrying backpacks of different colours, proceeded along the zigzagging mountain path like a colourful gyrating dragon. At 12:20 p.m., one of the groups first reached the summit and its members shouted

excitedly at the top of their voices. But it was not until 1:30 p.m. that all the members had arrived.

We began our descent at 3:30 p.m. Instead of the paved stone stairway, we ducked into the bushes and began stumbling down the mountain along a narrow path. Going downhill is always better than going uphill. Less than two hours later we were back at the parking lot at the foot of the mountain.

September 8, Tuesday: Mt. Yunmeng

Weather: Cloudy turning overcast;

High temperature: 28°C

Our foreign friends found the soybean milk and porridge served for breakfast difficult to stomach, so they demanded coffee and black tea. When we were about to set out, the hotel manager demanded that we all return our room keys. Then it was discovered that some of us had failed to pay our telephone bills... Dealing with all these things put us more than an hour behind schedule.

Today we were in for another day of arduous trekking. We planned to stay for the night in a tiny village. Six members, after thinking it over, decided to give up trekking for the next two days. Cars were thus arranged to take them to where they were supposed to join us, the Badaling Hot Spring Resort.

The rest of us drove towards the Yunmeng Mountain in three buses. At 10:40 a.m. the delegation began climbing the mountain along a stairway which gradually led us into the depths of the mountain area. Along the way insects kept humming and birds chirped incessantly — all to the accompaniment of the murmuring of a nearby stream. Having nosed our way through a forest we suddenly found ourselves atop a big monolith. The silvery chain of a cataract tumbled down the mountain right from underneath our feet. After a short respite we went on our way again. Our plan was to trudge for seven or eight hours, and arrive at our campsite, Duijiahe, before sunset. We left this cataract and went on our way again, switching back and forth between a

riverside path and the riverbed.

Having walked through a vast track of pine trees, we reached a place where a big waterfall emptied itself into a clear pool at 2:20 p.m. One young companion jumped into the pool for a comfortable splash. The others laid out an impressive lunch — Chinese-style hamburgers, eight-treasure congee, peanuts, chocolates, soft drinks, apples...

From our walkie-talkie we were informed that Sandra, a representative from Barbados, was trailing behind because she had sprained her ankle, and the doctor and two guides were taking care of her as she tried to catch up. John, our team leader, wanted us to wait until Sandra caught up, but our delegation leader, Lina, thought otherwise. As a group we were moving too slowly and we were way behind schedule. So, instead, she suggested that we redouble our efforts and make for the campsite. It was not until 3:40 p.m. that the team went on its way again along a riverbed. We found ourselves jumping from one stone to another. The water was so attractive that now and then, we scooped water with our hands to wash our heads and faces, or soaked our feet, or laid back to observe the vast blue sky.

The entire delegation was slow in action, as groups generally are. At 7:10 p.m. our vanguard of about 30 members reached Duijiahe,



1. A section of the aged Great Wall
2. Trekking through the mountains
3. Enjoying the break after a long trek
4. Happy companions



where dinner, including two roasted whole sheep, had been prepared. A bonfire was started, and music was played to greet the new arrivals. By now dusk had already fallen. The second team headed by Lina were drawing near the campsite but in the dimming light were having difficulty finding the route. Several of us turned back to help, leaving the rest of the team behind for a short rest. At that time the weather suddenly took an about-face. Black clouds appeared, and along with the thunder there was lightning, striking like fire-spitting dragons from the sky and illuminating the world around us like daytime. At a high point we spotted the group coming our way, their hand-held torches forming a beautiful fire dragon slowly moving towards us. A head count revealed that eight were still missing, including the doctor and Sandra, who were probably stranded on the riverbed about three kilometres from the campsite. Guides were summoned, and eight local porters hired to rescue them. About one hour later, everyone was found. The local porters took turns carrying Sandra all the way to the campsite. By the time the team had been reunited it was already 2:20 a.m. Still in high spirits, we ate, drank and chatted around the bonfire.

September 9, Wednesday: Mt. Yunmeng

Weather: Sunny; High temperature: 30°C

At 4:50 a.m., in the twilight of dawn, roosters were crowing. We

got up, having slept barely two hours, and went to wash by a nearby stream. The chilly water instantly drove away the drowsiness. The campsite was in a 50-family village where the majority of its working population work away from home. The abodes are of the crudest type. Every household raises pigs and chickens, and some also herd goats. Corn and soybeans are major crops here. Some of the villagers had shown some business acumen when they charged highly for everything they did for us, even boiling a kettle of water, and renting cooking pots, bowls and tea sets. Some of them, having obviously forgotten the fine Chinese traditions of propriety and hospitality, resorted to theft, to the great chagrin of our foreign friends, and the great embarrassment of their Chinese compatriots.

September 10 Thursday: The Great Wall

Weather: Sunny turning overcast;

High temperature: 28°C

At 9:30 a.m. we began climbing up the mountain from the western gully at the foot of Badaling along its grass-infested ridge. Nondescript flowers along the way emitted a pleasant scent while butterflies danced merrily around us. One hour and a half later we mounted the Great Wall, cheering and jumping in sheer excitement. This section of the Great Wall was crumbling due to age, and overgrown with wild grass, but every brick and every stone here seemed to be telling a story



about the Herculean efforts of the ancient Chinese who built this formidable defence work.

We crossed the narrow and dilapidated wall, and picked our way gingerly towards a highland in the north, in the direction of the Badaling section of the Great Wall. About one hour later, we reached our destination. Here, the Great Wall, restored and preserved in good shape, burst forth upon the eye in its glorious form, crawling up and down the contours of a magnificent mountain. It is reported that when the American astronaut, Armstrong, was travelling to the moon, he observed that the Great Wall was the only man-made structure he could see from space.

Delegation members lost no time in taking snapshots or posing for pictures against the huge backdrop of the Great Wall. Local vendors roamed about shouting their wares — they seemed to be doing a roaring business. After having our lunch at the Badaling Restaurant, we immediately went on our way in the direction of the Qinglongqiao section of the Great Wall. Because the road consisted of a steep mountain slope as well as what was called the “doggy hole”, only 38 members and five guides (including the doctor) participated in this excursion headed by Lina. Later, when we rejoined them, Lina reported that one team member, who happened to be a Tibetan, and one team leader named Wang were singing folk songs and dancing right atop the Great Wall, which prompted many foreign friends to take the stage to show their singing and dancing talent. The entire delegation was reunited at the old railway station at Qinglongqiao at 5:10 p.m. We, as the largest international tourist group, had accomplished our seven-hour trek along the Great Wall.

September 11, Friday: Longqing Gorge

Weather: Sunny, High temperature: 31°C

This is the last day of our five-day trek. Longqing Gorge is a reservoir built in the mountains in Yanqing County. Its charming scenery of steep cliffs and green waters has made it a famous tourist attraction in Beijing.

When we arrived at the entrance, we were informed that the mountain path was being repaired to make way for a new cable car. We helped each other through the work-site, and at 10:00 a.m. we climbed onto the top of the mountain. Along the way we found that



Carol suffered from acrophobia; her face was wet with sweat and tears, and her hand held fast to my shoulder bag as she proceeded along, not daring to cast a single glance at the deep ravine. I tried my best to soothe her with jokes until she finally calmed down.

At noon we completed our trekking programme and returned to Yudu Hotel. After lunch we set out immediately for downtown, where we checked into the Minzu Hotel. That night we attended the performance of Puccini's opera *Turandot* in the Forbidden City, which was causing quite a sensation throughout the entire Chinese capital.

September 12, Saturday: Beijing

Weather: Sunny turning Cloudy, High temperature: 28°C

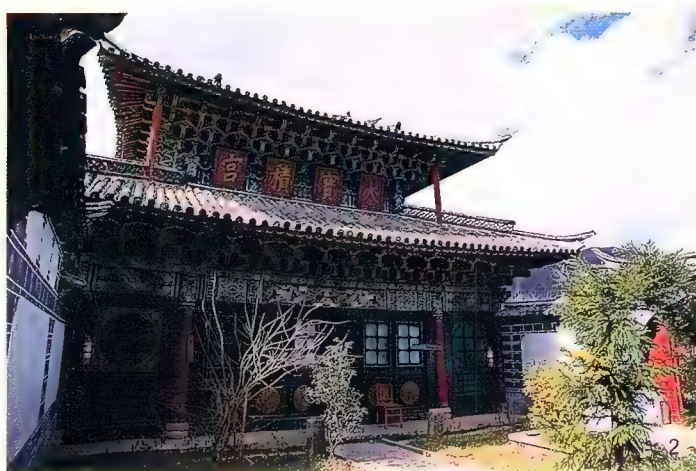
This is the most relaxing day of our entire trip. There was no more trekking, nor anyone to shake us awake from our sound sleep. The only activity of the day was a visit to the Palace Museum, and 54 members participated; the others chose their own agenda. Dinner and the farewell party were held at the Quanjude Peking Roast Duck Restaurant, where our foreign friends were given the feast of their lives. We sang, danced and improvised short plays, and exchanged name cards. After it was all over, the staff formed a corridor as we shook hands and said good bye to each other.

Translated by Ling Yuan

1. The campsite nestled in the mountain
2. The joy of mounting the Great Wall



Photos by Xing Yi Article by Chen Hao



The ancient Lijiang town on the northwest plateau of Yunnan has long been known as a town of waters. Poetry has described it this way: "Little bridges lie across numerous canals; all households stand by riverside." In this charming region of rivers and lakes, ancient Lijiang's rich cultural treasures also stand out.

Just north of Lijiang is Baishajie. "Jie" (street) originally meant a country fair or market, but later became part of the name of the township. Baishajie has an even longer history than the famous Sifang (Square) Street in Lijiang, a transfer station on the ancient Tea Road. It has many old dilapidated buildings, including Dabaoji Palace, Liuli Hall and Dading Pavilion. It is here



that the famous Lijiang murals are housed.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties the Mu family, tribal headmen who ruled the Lijiang region, made great contributions to Lijiang's Naxi culture. Forefathers of the Mu reportedly created the Dongba language, now honoured as "written living fossils". In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Mu De, the seventh-generation successor of the Mu family, became Lijiang's first official administrator appointed by the imperial court. After his visit to the imperial capital Nanjing, the headman Mu brought back ancient Han and Buddhist music. In the later year, the Lijiang culture, a blend of the culture of the Central Plains and that of the local ethnic groups, continued to develop and flourish. Meanwhile, Buddhism was advocated and eventually became an influential factor to the local culture. As a result, Lijiang became a cultural centre where people of varied backgrounds gathered, be they eminent monks from the Central Plains,

lamas from Tibet, or scholars and artists from across the country.

During the 300 years from the early Ming to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the headmen built many temples, such as the Dabaoji Palace, Liuli Hall, Dading Tower, Fuguo Temple, Juexian Temple, Hufa Hall, Guiyi Hall and Guangbi Tower, with religious murals painted on their walls. Dabaoji Palace was built in the late Ming Dynasty. Its 12 murals totalling 61.48 square metres are the largest and best preserved in the Lijiang area. Liuli Hall, built in the early Ming, has a double-eaves roof. On its inside upper eaves there are 16 murals painted in different periods, from the time of its construction to the end of the Qing Dynasty. Typical representatives of the Lijiang murals, the earliest ones are simple and unadorned, while the later ones are drawn boldly.

Lijiang's murals are more than just ancient art works; this art, a kind of language of its own, is also a valuable historical record. In the murals in the Dabaoji Palace, various Buddhist images, such as Bodhisattva, monks and guardians, stand opposite pictures of Taoist gods painted in bright, heavy colours in an exaggerated style. There are no religious barriers nor artistic shackles here.

The Lijiang murals are actually a collection of the art works of many artists over a dozen generations. They reflect well the great zeal of the ancient masters, who painted on the ancient temples' walls, displaying their talents, stating their beliefs and expressing their personalities. The Han master Ma Xiaoshan, for example, brought in the traditional methods of outlining painting and embossed foiling from the Central Plains; the Tibetan master, Jichang, painted the Tantrist images in exquisite layout and colour; the artists of the Naxi and Bai ethnic groups demonstrated their own styles; and many other painters also added to the overall work. Whatever their beliefs and wherever they came from, these painters, as a team of talents, have created in the Lijiang murals a splendid historical heritage with great everlasting value. 

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

1. Lijiang murals reflect the influence of Buddhist culture.
2. The Dabaoji Palace
3. Detail of a mural depicting a religious figure
4. The imposing Yulong Mountain



Location Map of Karqugar Village



Descendants of the Lop People

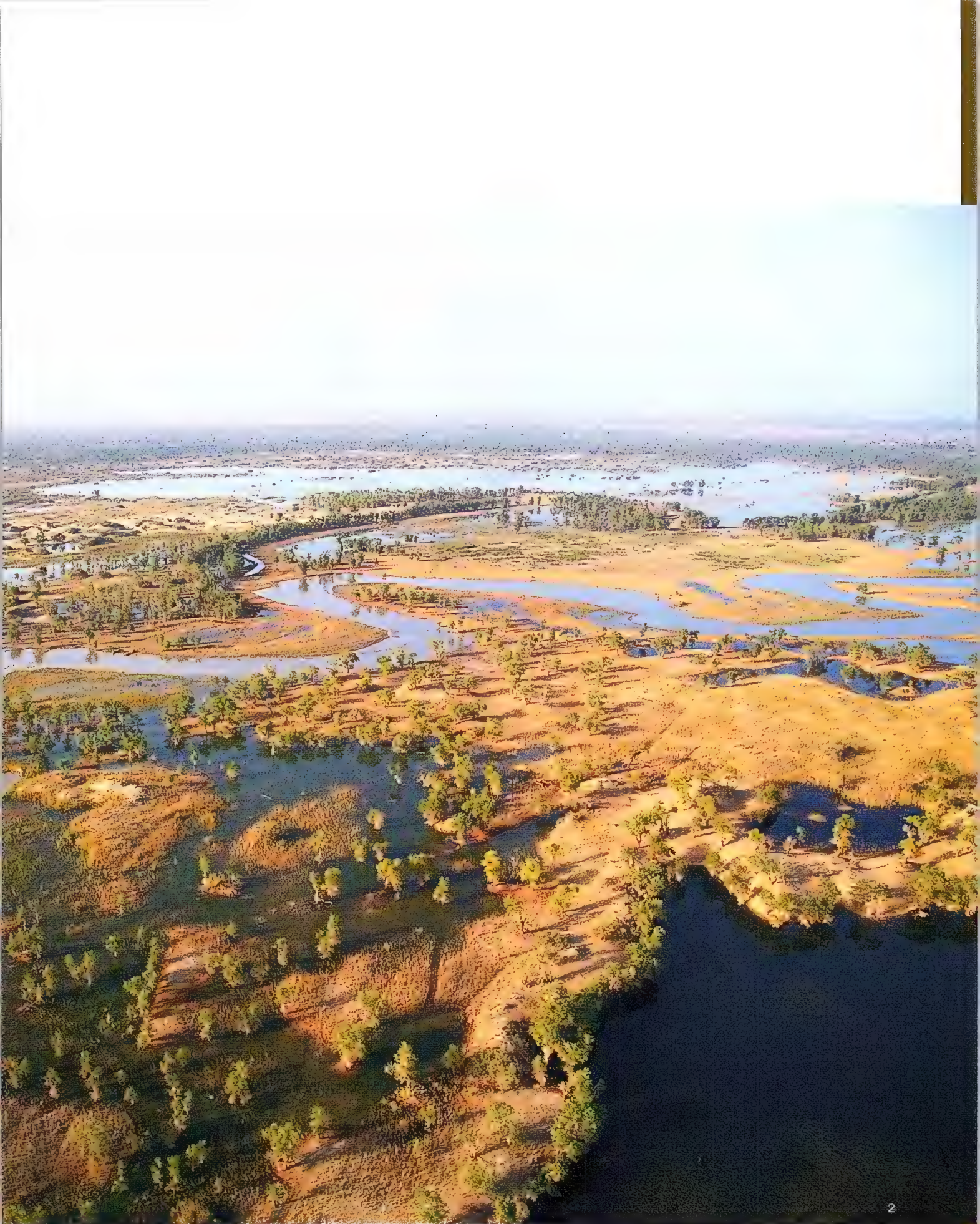
Photos by Song Shijing Article by Xu Bicheng

The Lop People



We took a train from Uriümqi, passed Daban and Toksun into Korla; then we changed to a bus to Yuli in the Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture in Xinjiang. From here we drove towards Karqugar, a village inhabited by descendants of the Lop people.







The Unforgettable Golden Autumn

It was early October when we drove onto a highway out of town. Immediately large patches of reed groves came into view. We were in the upper section of the lower reaches of the Tarim River where the surrounding waterlogged land provided an ideal home to many plants.

Having crossed a small bridge, we passed through a reed grove. The reed stems were pale yellow while the flowers were fluffy white. This combination under a clear blue sky dotted with white clouds offered a view of special charm. In the gentle wind, the reeds danced lightly, shaking their bodies gracefully. And the fluffy flowers seemed like young women's hair, flowing with an air of fragrance. When we passed the Second Pastoral Farm, the stone paved road came to its end. Ahead of us were rolling sand dunes.

Later we entered an endless forest of diversiform-leaf poplar trees after meandering across dozens of sand dunes. We came in the right season. Golden foliage crowned the poplars, making every one resemble a cluster of yellow clouds.

Losing Our Way in the Dark

It was 7 p.m. and the car's odometer showed we had driven over a hundred kilometres, meaning that we should have arrived at Karqugar. Consulting our guide map, we realised that the small paths before us did not point to any particular direction. Obviously lost, we guessed that the Usman River, a tributary of the Tarim River, was not far. And if we could find the river, we could find our destination.

Darkness was complete and the only lights were ours. The reeds and red willows were so thick that our lights could not illuminate the way ahead. The "path" was actually nothing more than horse or donkey cart tracks on the grassland. In the end, the younger people got out to look for tracks to the river, yet an hour and a half later there was still no sign of any. At that point, we split into two groups and fanned out, and came across the river just a hundred metres away — this brought loud cheers. We followed it and at 11 p.m. we finally arrived at Karqugar.

A Party in a Lop Home

"Karqugar" means "a place with many eagles" in the local people's language.

As we walked towards a house with lights on, we heard music. We pushed the door open, and a dozen people who were enjoying themselves, singing and

We entered an endless forest of poplars after meandering across sand dunes. Golden foliage crowning the poplars resembled a cluster of yellow clouds.

Previous page:

1. There are many centenarians among the Lop people.
2. Descendants of the Lop people now live where rivers and ponds are many in the lower reaches of the Tarim River.

This page:

1. Today, the Lop people still use a kind of canoe made by hollowing out poplar trunks.
2. Nang is a daily necessity for the Lop people.
3. Isolation has helped preserve some of the Lop people's traditions.





eating, came to greet us. The two elderly ones invited us to sit on the heated *kang* (brick bed) and the hostess brought us each a bowl of hot milk tea. She happened to have a few visitors who were eating their meal before the dancing was due to start. The host brought us some tasty *nang*, the Xinjiang pizza, and meat which, according to local custom, should be eaten with the fingers.

After the meal, we all were given wine, each cup filled to its brim. Each time the host proposed a toast, we had to drink the whole cup. Any guest who did not swallow it all must have a very good reason, or the



4. A cemetery of the Lop people amidst a poplar forest
5. Making a carpet with home-dyed wool



host would be angry that his sincerity was not appreciated. The host also prevented guests from drinking too much. Next, as Lop girls played *dongbula*, a local stringed instrument, and sang melodious tunes, several young men and women started dancing. The girls' colourful skirts gently swirled as they danced gracefully, like clouds moving across the sky, while young men moved in quick and merry steps. Unable to resist the atmosphere, we all joined in. We stayed with this family that night.

Ancient-style Canoes

Since their settlements have been rather isolated from the rest of the world, the Lop people have preserved some unique cultural traditions and

primitive ways of life. The Lop people near the rivers and ponds of the lower reaches of the Tarim River build their houses using poplar trunks as the frame and willow woven into it for the walls. Mud then covers the woven willow. Red willow fences surround the house on all sides to form a courtyard. The door is made of two pieces of poplar — it is all done very simply.

Inside each house is a bed large enough to accommodate a dozen people, with neatly piled, colourful quilts at one end. Beautiful tapestries hang on the walls.

Though life and lifestyle have changed greatly, the Lop people still love to use the traditional *karpén* — an ancient-style canoe made from a hollowed-out half

1. Houses built with tree branches and mud are warm enough to resist the winter cold.



of a poplar trunk. In this canoe for two or three people, the oars, which are about three times the size of those on ordinary boats, are used for both rowing and pushing the canoe.

Roasted Fish — Key to Longevity

One afternoon, a Lop fisherman called Usman invited us to go fishing at a large pond with several of his companions. Overhead, hundreds of black and white birds darted about. It was a real surprise to see so many birds on the edge of the huge desert known as the "sea of death". The man rowing the *karpen* slowed down and cast a net. Soon he hauled up enough fish for a meal. We enjoyed the cruise until the sun was about to set. Then we stopped at a site where the red willows grew in thick bushes.

With sharpened willow branches, Usman skewered the fish he had cut into halves for roasting. The cooking fire, entirely of willow branches, brings out a most delicious flavour.

2. An outdoor oven for baking
3. Contact with the outside is a recent development, but so far the whole village has only one post box.
4. The Lop people used to live off fishing until Lop Nur dried up. They then turned into herdersmen.



Since the Lop people live in rather isolated settlements, they have preserved their unique culture in some primitive ways. They use of a unique form of canoe.





In the dim light, Usman's fire cast everyone's smiling faces in red. People teased and joked and turned the fish at the same time. A special aroma assailed our nostrils and soon we ate the tasty fish in big mouthfuls. No spices or other ingredients were necessary. Later on we discovered that eating fish was one of the secrets of the Lop people's longevity.

Home of Centenarians

In Ruqiang (Qarlik) and Luntai (Bugur) counties, centenarians are a common sight. Near Yuli, we interviewed Emai Ubli, an 101-year-old man. He told us that fish was the Lop people's staple food in earlier times. The fish was either boiled or baked without oil and spread with cattail pollen. (Now cattail pollen is commonly used in health foods.) Other foods included white, tender reed rhizomes and corn flour and oleaster fruit congee, and occasionally wild game. With such a diet, they often lived past 100 years of age. They made their clothes from Lop jute or cloth they traded on the market with otter furs.

From the government office of Karqugar

Township we learned that in recent years, assistance was offered to the Lop people to develop production by cultivating cotton and wheat, and efforts were also made to build such public service facilities as schools, hospitals and post offices. As their contact with the outside increases, the Lop people have built up their concept of a commodity economy. Some of them sell the fish they caught at the bazaar. The living standard of the Lop people has thus significantly improved.

On returning to Golmud, we met with Director Lei of the Tourism Bureau of Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture. He informed us of plans to build a reproduction of an ancient Lop village where tourists will soon be able to trek in a poplar tree forest on camels, go fishing in *karpen* canoes on the Tarim River, and attend gala parties around bonfires, eating roasted fish, singing and dancing....

Translated by F. Huang

Fish, spread with cattail pollen, was the staple food for the Lop people of earlier times. With a diet also including reed rhizomes, oleaster fruit congee and occasionally wild game, they often lived to 100 years old.

1. Simple houses built entirely with woven tree branches and twigs. Air easily passing through is an advantage in the summer heat.
2. Eating utensils made from poplar wood
3. The Lop people are warm, sincere and hospitable.





Vicissitudes of the Lop Community



Mysterious Lop Nur

The mysterious Lop Nur was part of the ancient kingdom of Loulan, home to many Lop people, and served as a transportation hub on the ancient Silk Road.

In recent history, scholars, scientists, explorers, travellers as well as thieves of cultural relics, have surmounted difficulties to cross this desolate "forbidden zone". Chinese scientist Peng Jiamu and explorer Yu Chunshun, for example, went in but never came out.

During 1997-98, three groups of ordinary Chinese travellers successively traversed the formidable Lop Nur region, drawing world attention to the region.

The First Discovery of the Ancient Loulan

In a poplar tree forest near Yuli County lies the tomb of Erdik. Smai Shadik, explained that Erdik, his grandfather, was the Lop guide for Sven Hedin, the Swedish explorer, about 100 years ago.

In September 1899, Hedin set out from Ruoqiang towards Lop Nur. Twenty-two days later, while trying to dig for water, the spade was missing. Erdik went to look for it, but he never returned. *As, they* *form swept up* *as he* *ral traditions and* *him* *return.* *opened his* *aw several mud* *of life, including their* *of ancient-style* *ouses, the ruins of an*

ancient city! He returned to Hedin with several pieces of wood carved with words. Scientists later proved that this was the ruins of the ancient city of Loulan that had been hidden for nearly 2,000 years.

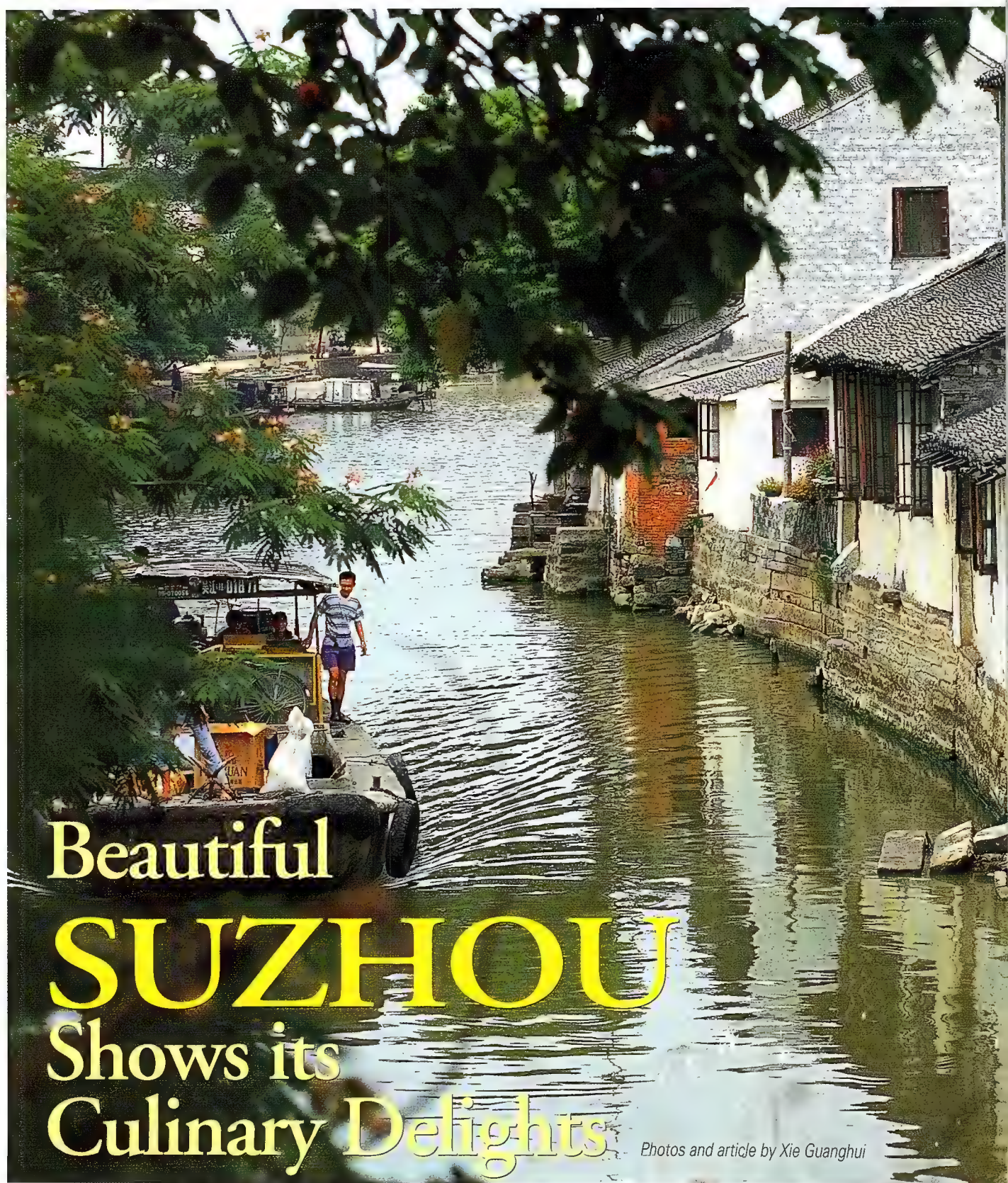
Migration of the Lop People

Two thousand years ago, when Lop Nur was wide and expansive, the ancient kingdom of Loulan was prosperous. Later the kingdom perished and the lake shrank as well. The Lop people who depended on fishing had to migrate and most ended up in Kebudan in Ruoqiang County. Around 1920 a disaster hit the village. A life-threatening disease similar to the plague causing continuous high fever and skin rashes, took thousands of lives. Only a small number of people relocated to Qunke and Tieganklik in Yuli County, and a few others to Lop Village and Milan in Ruoqiang County. A tiny group moved to Luntai County.

Two or three generations after that major migration, statistics show that there are now about 13,000 Lop people altogether.



1. Elderly Lop people who luckily escaped death from the plague of 1920. When this picture was taken in 1982, the youngest was over 70 years old. (file picture)
2. A united exploration team of Chinese and Swedish sailing for the Lop Nur in 1934
3. Daily utensils unearthed from tombs of the ancient kingdom of Loulan (file picture)
4. Lop people fishing on the Kalarheshun Lake 80 years ago. The lake dried up in the 1970s. (file picture)



Beautiful
SUZHOU
Shows its
Culinary Delights

Photos and article by Xie Guanghui



Suzhou in East China's Jiangsu Province is famous for two things, its elegant gardens and local flavour dishes.

One of the oldest cities on the Yangtse Delta, Suzhou has a history of 2,500 years. A series of interlocking canals from the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, completed during the Sui Dynasty (581-618), bring plentiful water into the city, sustaining a series of beautiful, classical gardens in a typical style mixing and balancing water, rocks, buildings, and greenery. This might be part of the reason that Suzhou was chosen as the site for the US TV show "Yan Can Cook".

Although Martin Yan, a star cook on American TV, has travelled all over the world, he says Suzhou is the only place he would want to settle down. This may be due to the Chinese culture of his early childhood, but in fact throughout history many Chinese scholars, aristocrats, merchants, actors, painters and pleasure-seekers have had the same idea. The consequence was the

1. Canal-side households are part of the elegance of Suzhou.
2. Assuming the role of a farmer



numerous gardens built in Suzhou for which the city is now famous.

A Performance in Zhuozheng Garden

Yan's Suzhou tour began with the Zhuozheng Garden, the most famous of the Suzhou gardens. This was originally a private garden belonging to Wang Xianchen, a court official of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) who was dismissed from office and returned home.

Immediately on entering the Eastern Garden at the Lanxue Hall, a small hill, a lawn, a little bridge over a stream, several towers and green woods all come into view at once. Traversing the long Yihong Corridor separating the Eastern Garden from the



Central Garden you pass a round gate, and view the Xiuyi Tower standing like a bouquet of flowers on top of a green hill, with the Loquat Garden nestled quietly by its side. The Loquat Garden, a garden within a garden, provides another, different view.

Turning this way and that all around the garden, you can delight in the rockeries, man-made hills, towers and the pond. In midsummer, all the lotus flowers in the pond are in full bloom, and the sweeping willows sway in the breeze on the banks. From time

to time the wind wafts the delicate fragrance of the lotus flowers in all four directions. On the tower beside the pond, there is a plaque with the inscription "Wind in the Lotus Comes from All Sides", and on the a pillar of the tower is the antithetical couplet: "Lotus flowers are on four sides and willows on three sides, A half pond of autumn water is close by a small hill."

Standing in the tower, Martin Yan was busy performing for the cameras. As it was in the middle of the summer, he was dripping with perspiration and constantly needed to redo his make-up. Still not up to the requirements of the director, he escaped into the shade of the willows on the banks of the lotus pool, asking for a few moments break from the heat before starting to film again.

Sitting down on a rock, Yan splashed water onto the lotus leaves with his hands. He disclosed his thoughts: "Among all flowers I love the lotus the best, because not only does it have an exalted character but it also is a kind of green food. Its leaves can be used to make steamed pork, its seeds can be made into soup, and its roots can be cooked into a delicious dish together with glutinous rice. Unfortunately, here, I don't have the

right supplies to cook these types of dishes right now."

Songhelou Restaurant — One of the 'Big Three'

In Suzhou there is a saying: "You visit Xuanmiao Temple but eat at Taijian Lane." The oldest and most famous place on Taijian Lane, a food centre south of Guanqian Street, is Songhelou Restaurant. This restaurant is one of the "Big Three" restaurants south of the Yangtse River, the other two being Louwailou in Hangzhou and Yingbinlou in Wuxi. Songhelou is famous for its "Squirrel-shaped Mandarin Fish". The cook takes the mandarin fish cultivated in Taihu Lake and carves it exquisitely into the shape of a squirrel; it is then fried in oil and covered with a sauce of shrimp, diced bamboo shoots and tomato paste. Sweet but a bit sour, a bit salty but very tender, the fish is one of the



representative dishes of Suzhou. Other famous culinary delights include dishes made with eel or shrimps.

Opposite the Songhelou Restaurant are Deyuelou Restaurant and Wangsi Restaurant, which are famous for their "Deyue Chicken" and "Beggar's Chicken" respectively.

Near the Xuanmiao Temple at the eastern end of Taijian Lane is a snack centre selling refreshments with unique Suzhou flavours. Some people say there are more than 200 different kinds of refreshments in Suzhou. The Suzhou people have a special reverence for glutinous rice snacks. Cakes made of glutinous rice alone are prepared in over 150 different varieties.

Cooking on a Farmer's Stove

The next morning Martin Yan went to the home of a family living beside a branch of the Grand Canal in the suburbs; one segment of his programme involved showing how the farmer's foods are cooked. He started by picking vegetables directly from the plot and cleaning them. But when he finally stood by the kitchen stove and tried to put "Yan Can Cook" into practice, he found the intensity of the fire of the stove was not sufficient and could not be controlled well. With difficulty, he cooked several dishes in succession, but none reached his usual level of perfection. He would have to edit those snapshots back in the United States.

Having finished filming early in the farmer's house, Martin and his film team went shopping in the art store on Shiquan Street in the city. At one privately-owned shop, the Australian cameraman caught sight of a painting entitled *The Concubine After*



Taking a Bath and gazed intently. The shrewd manager noticed and quickly came over to peddle the painting to him in English. The cameraman mentioned that it would be a better painting if the concubine beauty was not a profile. The manager astounded him by immediately painting another one of the same subject in a frontal view for him.

The Suzhou Restaurant Scene

Suzhou local specialties mainly revolve around fresh water products. The people are very particular about the culinary art, colouring, cutting and presentation, no matter whether the food is stewed, simmered, deep-fried or quick-fried. Emphasis is placed on keeping the original flavour and taste of the food, and dishes are supposed to be crisp and savoury, neither too sweet nor too salty. Songhelou Restaurant is famous for typical Suzhou dishes.

Xinfengju Restaurant is another old restaurant in Suzhou featuring specialties such as "Eight-treasure Boneless Chicken", "Stewed Duck" and "Braised Chicken with

Chestnuts". In addition, there are many other restaurants in the same area and at the scenic spots in the suburbs serving similar foods and various kinds of refreshments.

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

1. Visiting a household in Suzhou
2. Tasting the real local flavour
3. Bicycles, an essential mode of transport, carry almost anything here.
4. Crabs cooked in a purple pottery pot have a unique taste.
5. Washing the vegetables as the Suzhou people do
6. Another part of Suzhou's elegance is its embroidery.



The Zhuang People



Largest Minority Ethnic Group in China

Photos by Chan Yat Nin Article by Gloria Shang

The Zhuang people are the most populous among the 55 ethnic minorities in China, with a total population of 13.378 million. Over one million live in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in South China, with the rest scattered in the Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan and the Lianshan Zhuang and Yao Autonomous County in Guangdong, as well as Congjiang and Huajiang counties in Guizhou and Hunan provinces.

The Zhuang people are one of the original nationalities living in China. Their ancestors began to inhabit the area south of the Nanling Mountains, mainly today's Guangdong and Guangxi, many thousands of years ago. In Chinese history books, they are recorded as a branch of the Baiyue State during the Spring and Autumn (770-476 B.C.) and the Warring States (475-221 B.C.) periods. Since the Song Dynasty (960-1279), they had been referred to by different names, such as "Zhuang", "Liang" and "Tu". In 1965, with the suggestion of late Premier Zhou Enlai, "Zhuang" became the identifying name for this ethnic group.

The Zhuang people have their own language, which belongs to the Zhuang-Dong family of the Chinese-Tibetan language system; a written language based on Latin letters was created in 1955 and improved in 1978. Most Zhuangs also speak the Han Chinese and written Chinese is widely used among them.

Today, in cities and many rural areas, the Zhuang people are clad not much differently from the Hans, but in some remote villages, people still prefer their unique traditional costumes. The Zhuang women like to wear collarless tops open on the left, decorated with



embroidered laces. Their trousers, loose and bell-shaped, also have embroidered laces sewn at the bottoms. Over the trousers, they put on a folded skirt and an apron. Their shoes are also beautifully embroidered. Silver jewellery is a must for the Zhuang women.

Fertile and Beautiful Homeland

The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region was founded in March 1958. One-third of the region's 36.42 million population are of the Zhuang ethnic group, the rest being the Han and a dozen other ethnic minorities. Located in the sub-tropical zone, Guangxi is a fertile land with warm weather and plentiful rainfall. It is rich in many types of agricultural produce, such as rice, corn, wheat, sugarcane, peanuts, tobacco, tea and fruits. The region is also a significant producer of pearl, timber, iron, gold, and several other minerals for China.

However, what makes the Zhuang people feel most proud of their autonomous region is its unmatched beautiful scenery. Guangxi is a world-famous area of karst landscapes. Within the region, there are numerous limestone peaks, rocks and caves. Together with the rivers meandering through, they create the most attractive scenes. The best representatives of the charming Guangxi scenery are found along the Lijiang River between Guilin and Yangshuo, where the elegant peaks in varied forms, the poetic quiet fields and villages, and the clear waters with reflections of the mountains and bamboo groves on the shores,

1. A Zhuang woman in traditional costume
2. The Zhuangs are skilled large-scale sculptors. (by Zhuang Xiaolin)
3. On the roof of a Zhuang farmer's home (by Mo Disheng)



form one fascinating picture after another. A cruise on the Lijiang River from Guilin to Yangshuo is such an entertaining experience that the passenger feels as if he or she were visiting a great art gallery of traditional Chinese paintings. Inside the limestone caves, which are plentiful in this area, stalactites and stalagmites appear in all sorts of formations: curtains, flowers, animals and human figures, creating a fantastic fairy land.

The charming scenery and colourful ethnic customs attract tourists from home and abroad to Guangxi. Guilin has become a favourite destination; and in Yangshuo, a street has been nicknamed "Foreigners Street" because of the many Western-style cafes and restaurants — and Western visitors.

Traditional Wedding Customs Still Alive

The Zhuangs are monogamous in marriage. But they retain the custom that after a woman gets married, she stays with her parents for two or three years before she moves into her husband's house.

The Zhuang weddings are characteristic. In the northern mountainous area of Guangxi, the bride usually needs to cross several rivers to reach her new home. Every time she goes over a stream or a bridge, the bride has to be carried by an unmarried young man, called the "water man". Before they cross the river, a canon should be fired three times, accompanied by the playing of trumpets. The "water man" then bows down and carries the bride carefully on his back. During the process, he must be very polite and behave himself — joking or rude words are forbidden. Meanwhile, the "greeting maid", played by an unmarried young woman, holds the umbrella for the bride and the team follows in a long line over the river. But for a bride in the Longsheng area, the river is only one of the "10 gates" she has to pass through in order to reach her bridal chamber. There are a series of others awaiting her, such as "greeting", "antiphonal singing", "going out of the gate"...

In some areas, the bride is greeted by fierce fireworks at three



points of her bridegroom's house: the gate, the living room and the bridal chamber. So the bride must be well prepared and brave enough to charge in. If she cannot make it the first time, she has to do it for the second or even third time under the observation of a massive crowd. After the dinner, there is another test for the bride — she has to carry water in the dark until all the water vats in her new home are filled. Only then, usually after midnight, will the guests leave, allowing the bride to retreat to her room together with the bridegroom.

Unique Home-brew Liquors

When the Zhuang people drink, they drink liquors made of their home-brewed rice wine mixed with chicken gall bladder, chicken stomach, or pig liver, each variety having its special taste.

The chicken gall bladder liquor is made by dripping the fresh gall bladder into the rice wine; generally one chicken gall bladder can flavour 100 grams of wine. The liquor will then taste bitter and sweet at the same time. Its lovely aroma remains in the mouth long after one finishes the drink.

When chicken stomach liquor is prepared, the cooked meat is chopped and put in a bowl; after wine is added, the liquor is ready. One is supposed to swallow the wine in one gulp and then chew the meat slowly. Pig liver liquor is made by putting sliced fresh liver into the wine. After seven or eight minutes, when the liver turns white, indicating the alcohol has soaked in, the wine can be drunk. The liver will become crispy and tasty.



A People of Born Singers

The Spring Festival (the Chinese New Year) is always the most important celebration of the

Zhuangs. But they also have their own unique festivals.

The Zhuangs are born singers, so the Singing Festival, which lasts several days, is an important part of their life. On the third day of the third lunar month, people pour into the fair site from all directions, bringing with them home-made colourful glutinous rice and eggs. At the fair, they first offer sacrifices to the Singing Goddess, Third Sister Liu, begging her to bestow them with more singing talent. Then the antiphonal singing begins. The songs are concocted on the spot, and the singing goes on until one party admits defeat. Many of their songs are witty and humorous, giving rise to laughter in the audience. This day is also the Zhuang's "Valentine's Day". Through singing, the young people find their love — as a token of love, the young man gives his girl a colourful silk ball.

The Ox Soul Festival falls on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, which is believed to be the birthday of the Ox King. On this day,



all farm work stops, and the farmers bathe their oxen and clean the sheds amidst the sounds of rhythmic drums. Furthermore, every family holds a ceremony to show respect for the ox at noon. When the lunch table is ready, laid with delicious dishes, and all the family members are seated, the head of the household leads the ox around the table. Songs are sung to convey their good wishes while multi-colour rice is fed to the animal. After this, everybody pats the ox's back gently to show their love.

The Zhuang people also celebrate the Maluo (Frog) Festival which, falling in the first lunar month, reflects their primitive beliefs in nature and animals. Zhongyuan Festival on the 14th day of the seventh lunar

month is a festival next only to the Spring Festival.

The Zhuang people have inherited a rich treasure of folklore, including myths, fairy stories, legends and folk songs. Among the most popular dances are the Drum Dance, Ox Dance and Cock Dance. As for singing, there are all kinds of gatherings for this purpose — singing contests, singing fairs and antiphonal singing.

1. Floral balls, a token of love between young men and women
2. Bronze drum is a symbol of the aged Zhuang culture.
(by Wang Mengxiang, Pan Qixu)
3. At the Singing Festival
4. A scene of jubilant celebration
5. Ox Dance of the Zhuang
6. Youngsters of the Zhuang





1

Duan Inkstone

— H E R I T A G E O F Z H A O Q I N G

Article by Liang Wenlian



2

The inkstone, into which ink is ground for use with a writing brush, is one of the four treasures of the study (the other three being the writing brush, ink stick and paper). Of the four well-known inkstone brands, Zhaoqing's Duan Inkstone is most famous.



3

DEVELOPING INTO AN ART

The inkstone came into existence in the Wude Period of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). But at that time it was only a scholar's instrument for grinding ink sticks. It was crude and simple, without any design or decoration. Later it developed into a practical piece of art.

In the mid-Tang Dynasty, an old inkstone mason passed the Duanxi stream as two red-crowned cranes flew into the stream and stayed in the water. The old man spread a net to catch them. When he pulled the net up, he found a strange stone with a crack in it and heard the sound of cranes singing. The old mason pried the stone along the crack, and it split into two inkstones. On each one, a crane stood erect on an old pine tree. When the news spread, inkstone masons everywhere began to imitate the inkstones, and eventually displayed their talents in creating other designs.

THE TEST OF QUALITY

The Duan Inkstone is famous for its solid, smooth and delicate stone texture. These features allow the ink stick to be ground easily and quickly. The ground ink is fine and slick, and does not clump on the hair of a writing brush. The ink will not fade for a very long time and never changes colour. Ink is never wasted in these inkstones; it does not dry up or absorb into the stone. Duan Inkstones all pass the test of quality — moisture from the palm in winter or summer remains on them for a long time.

GRAINS AND VEINS

The Duan Inkstone is produced from stone in an area between the Lanke Mountain, 20 kilometres to the east of Zhaoqing and the Beiling Mountain to the north of Seven-Star Crags, the best stone slabs coming from the Old Pit, Mazi Pit and Song Pit. The dark purple, dark brown and reddish black stone slabs here, which have veins in the shape of the eyes of a phoenix, parrot and pigeon, are considered as top quality. Emerald green veins, even more valued, are rarely seen. Most of the stone slabs have grains in shapes such as ice, rouge, horsetail, gold thread and gold-and-silver thread. Some have only a single grain while others have a combination of many grains. The various grains and colours mix and form many different beautiful pictures.



4

CREATIVITY BREAKS THROUGH

However, after many years of quarrying, the three stone pits — Old Pit, Mazi Pit and Song Pit — closed down. It was not until 1962 the quarrying of Song Pit was resumed, followed by Mazi Pit. Then, after some prospecting, the quarrying of Old Pit, which had been closed down since the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, resumed in 1972. Since 1978, machines have replaced manual labour in some processes of the Duan Inkstone production. Today, while maintaining traditional national and local features, Duan Inkstone has created new artistic pieces with new themes and concepts, making breakthroughs in shape, design and engraving.

For example, on a huge slab 2.10 metres long, 1.05 metres wide and 0.18 metre thick, the masons carved the map of the birthplace of Duan Inkstone through the method of condensation. Since 1996, the artists have begun to apply three-dimensional engravings to their inkstones. Accommodating the different shapes of the stones, they carved inkstones into various sculptures, such as crocodile, cicada, a pile of fruits, or a group of immortals, which exquisitely hide the grinding hollow inside them. These inkstones are really an art works though actually they function as a practical instrument for grinding ink.



5

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

1. *Nine Dragons and a Calabash*
2. *Happy Fish*
3. **The Duan Inkstone is famous for its solid, smooth and delicate stone texture.**
4. *Collecting the stones*
5. *Fragrance of Lingnan*
6. *Working on a huge inkstone*



6

Last year on a visit to the Huaiyang Temple Fair in Zhoukou Prefecture, Henan Province, I found row upon row of stalls selling different kinds of clay toys. I later found that these toys all had holes, through which, various sounds were produced when blown.

Legend says it was in Huaiyang that Fu Xi, the ancient Chinese god, and Nu Wa, the goddess, worked together to create human society. In the Ming Dynasty, a temple was built to worship Fu Xi. Fairs were held there every February with clay toys made as sacrifices.

Huaiyang clay toys have bright red, green, blue, yellow and white colours applied on a dark base to effect a bright and sharp contrast. Taking myths and fairy tales as their theme, these toys vary greatly in design. Most of them are closely connected with Fu Xi and Nu Wa, and the most popular ones, such as "Human-faced Monkey", "Monkey-head Goose", "Tiger with a Straw Hat", "Nine-head Bird" and "Tail-wagging Fish", come from the myths in *Book of Mountains and Seas*. They show the deep influence from the Central Plain culture. Strangely, all the clay toys produced here are generally called

CLAY DOGS

Photos & article by Mu Ren



The Human-faced Monkey delivers children.



Exaggerated reproductive organs on the figure's chest

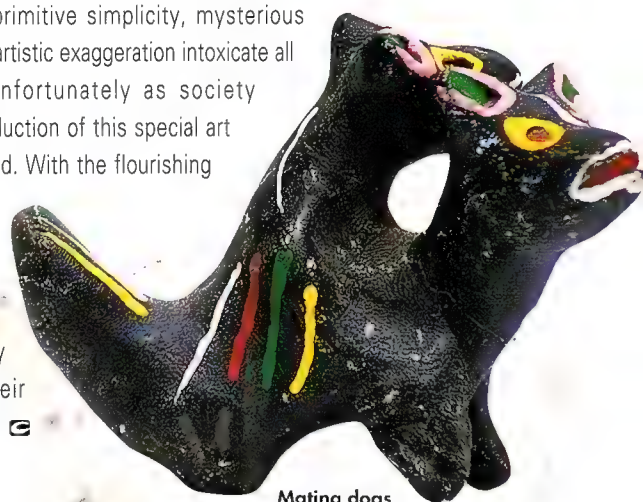
"clay dogs", no matter whether they are human figures, birds or animals.

A most popular one is "Heavenly Hound". With a uniquely shaped head, it has two huge ears, a wide-open mouth, protruding teeth, and red and yellow eyes. Its head and ear hairs are painted in patterns in red, green and yellow and it has thick and strong legs. Viewed as a whole, the heavenly hound looks very fierce and tough, but on the other hand, its human face with red lips and cheeks, and forehead dotted with auspicious red spots, makes it extremely loveable. While emphasising the features of a toy that children love, it also demonstrates the intimate relationship between

man and dog.

The "Human-faced Monkey" is customarily called the "the ancestor of humans" by the local people. It has a monkey head and human body, with simply-painted overlapping facial expressions: stupefied, ferocious, or surprised. It looks clever and intelligent and has acquired the ability to imitate, select, comprehend and express itself. Being a close relative of humans, the monkey seems to understand human nature much better than the dog.

Folk art's primitive simplicity, mysterious beauty and bold artistic exaggeration intoxicate all who see it. Unfortunately as society progresses, production of this special art form has declined. With the flourishing of tourism in this area, clay dogs, as souvenirs for tourists, may soon regain their vitality.



Mating dogs

On a Tractor

My hometown is Husitai, deep in the Kelqin Grassland in Inner Mongolia. My most memorable impression on my first visit home was of the tractor that took us from Yihuta to Husitai. Laden with people and luggage the tractor drove slowly. As it bumped along the rough road, many passengers' legs dangled rhythmically over the sides. Sandwiched between two huge bags, I gazed at the deep blue sky with sheets of white clouds floating slowly by. The wild flowers of the grassland were dazzling.

My grandpa sat in repose at the rear, his closed eyelids dancing with the jostling of the tractor. My aunt, afraid of the sunshine darkening her skin, wrapped herself up in a blanket, despite the unbearable heat. I admired her great willpower. The tractor's jolting movements often threw us up in mid-air.

crowds nor piles of bags. Of course, the smoothness of the ride still depended on the road. And on the rugged road we all suffered, rocking around inside. Holding on with both hands, I could not enjoy the beautiful scenes outside the window. I got out of the jeep feeling dizzy; it seemed that the jeep ride was far worse than that of the tractor.

On a Cart

During my stay in Husitai I fortunately had the chance to try another means of transport — the cart. One hot summer day at noon, my uncle harnessed a horse to a cart and took us to visit relatives. Soft cotton mattresses laid in the cart became scalding hot under the burning sun. Needless to say, we were all sweating. My uncle sat up front holding a whip in his hand. My mother wore exquisitely-made

JOURNEYS ON THE KELQIN GRASSLAND

Article by Boljinna

clothes of the old style, setting a sharp contrast to the grassland. My father leaned against the rear plank gazing at the fields of crops before us.

Lush crops were swaying in the breeze; tall corn plants were sprouting golden tassels; and calves were grazing on tender weeds. Far into the distance the vast green grassland was enveloped by the great blue sky. Bathed in the warm sunshine, we felt drowsy and closed our eyes on this pleasant cart ride; the fresh air came with a sweet aroma to assail our nostrils....



Translated by Xiong Zhenru

(by Wang Miao)

By the time we reached Husitai, my legs had become numb. I happily bid farewell to the tractor.

On a Jeep

By my second visit home, the tractor had been replaced by a jeep. It appeared more comfortable — soft seats and no

The author (13 years old) is a first-year student of the No.40 Middle School in Shenyang, capital of Liaoning Province in Northeast China.

Ever thought of spending a week or two to travel in China, Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos?

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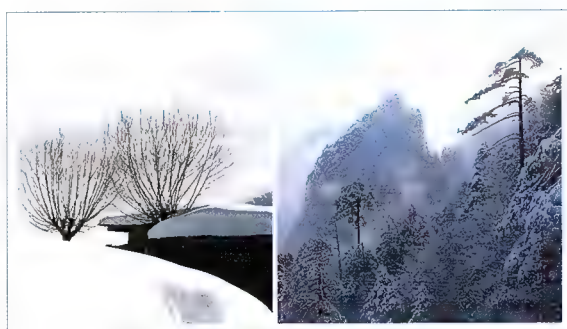
by Chuan Ya Min



by Lu Jianming

*countries, meeting people of varied ethnic groups and experiencing their distinctive customs, as well as tasting novel dishes of these people? The "Cover Story" in our next issue featuring **the cross-border tour in China, Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos** can surely satisfy your curiosity before you set out.*

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by Shi Boxiu

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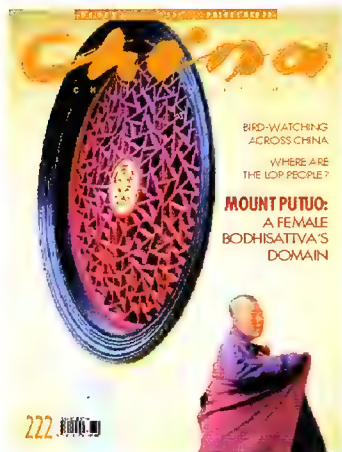
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Comments

(best)

(worst)

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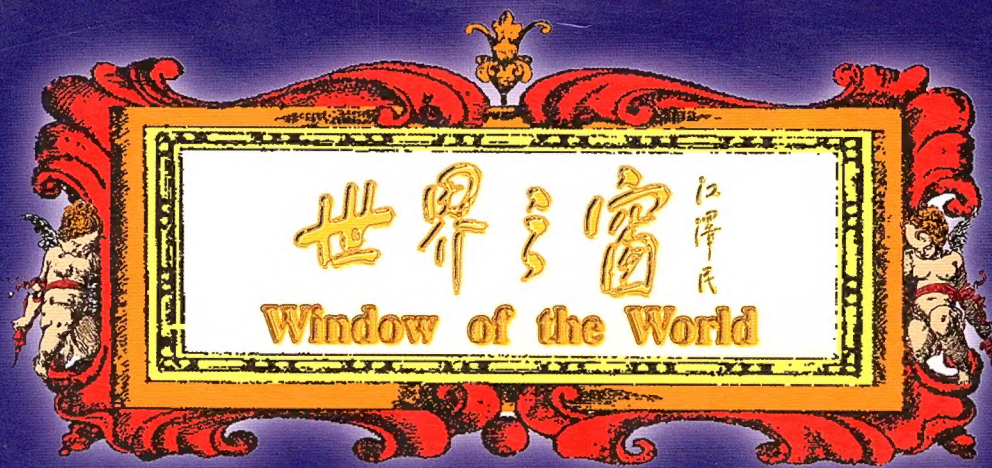
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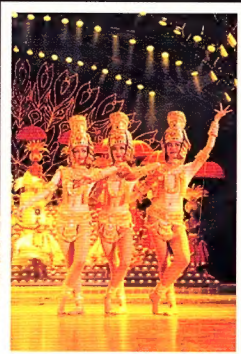
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